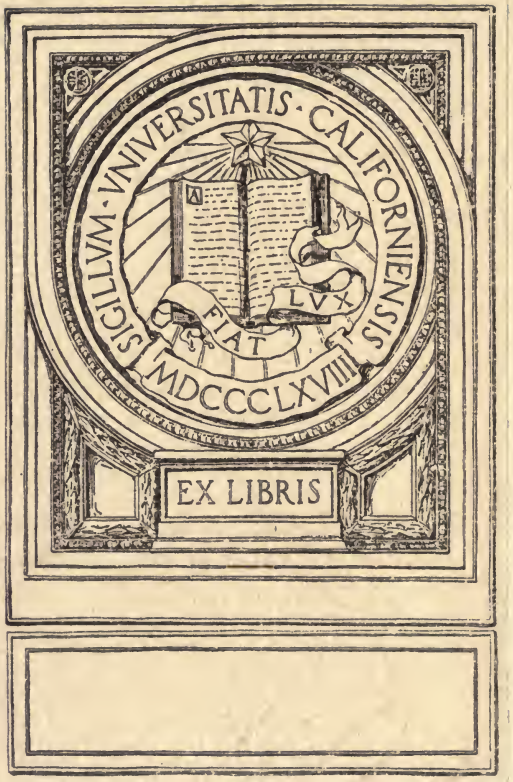
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MEDALLIONS

FROM EARLY FLORENTINE HISTORY

BY

EMILY UNDERDOWN

(*NORLEY CHESTER*)

AUTHOR OF "STORIES FROM DANTE," "CRISTINA, A ROMANCE OF ITALY IN THE OLDEN DAYS," "DANTE AND BEATRICE, A PLAY," ETC. ETC.

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PREFACE

THE following pages are not intended as a complete and detailed history of Early Florence. The important task of writing such a work has already been accomplished by abler pens. The object of the present volume has been rather to detach from the phantasmagoria of mediæval Italian politics certain of the more striking and important events connected with Florence; to free as far as possible from the dark atmosphere of petty intrigue, by which they are apt to be obscured and overshadowed, some of the most picturesque incidents, some of the most attractive personages, out of that entrancing but confused past. It has been endeavoured to place these before the reader as a sequence of *Medallions* rather than to weave them into a fixed design; to display them thus, hung as it were separately and with space for each to be viewed against its own background, instead of on those overcrowded walls of mediæval history where they of right belong, but where they may easily fail to acquire their due significance.

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The object in other words has been to impress the mind by a series of detached images in high relief, but all bearing on the central theme, and for this purpose the more romantic and picturesque side of the historical narrative has been the one to which the greater prominence has been given.

Material has been taken mainly from the Chronicles of Giovanni Villani and, for the later portions, of Dino Compagni; but the works of other historians have also been freely consulted, and in some cases not only details, but whole incidents, have been derived from other sources.

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MEDALLIONS

CHAPTER I

EARLY LEGENDS

A VALLEY whose meadows are fragrant with many blossoms, through which flow the waters of the Arno, silver at noontide, and rich gold towards set of sun, bounded far off to the west by the sparkling white marbles of the Carrara Mountains, and to the east by the purple heights of the richly wooded Apennines—such is the site on which the city of Florence has raised her walls and palaces and lofty towers.

The origin of the city is shrouded in mystery, but though the legends with which the old chroniclers have accounted for her existence must be regarded as legends alone, some of them are so interesting as to be worth repeating.

A little north-east of Florence, on the summit

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of a hill, stands the still older town of Fiesole, inhabited in earliest days by the ancient race of Etruscans. Thither, so the legend tells us, fled the Roman Catiline after the conspiracy which led to his banishment, and in pursuit of him came two other Romans named Fiorinus and Metellus. At that time there were two small villages where the Fiesolans held their market, on the spot where Florence now stands, and there the Roman generals encamped, and proceeded to besiege Fiesole, which still sheltered Catiline. For some time all went favourably for the Romans, but one night, when Fiorinus was off his guard, the Etruscans swarmed down on the camp, took it by surprise, and slew Fiorinus and most of his army. According to one account the family of Fiorinus was also put to death on that eventful night; but from another writer we have a different version, and he gives us an interesting story of the adventures which befell the wife and daughter of Fiorinus after he himself was slain.

He relates that the former, who was the most beautiful woman ever seen, and for this reason

called Belisca, was taken captive into Fiesole by a wicked knight named Pravus. Fortunately for her, she was rescued from him by Catiline, who happened to see her and fall in love with her himself, so he put her in a place of safety, and protected her. In the meantime a similar adventure had befallen Belisca's daughter Teverina, who was almost as beautiful as her mother, and she too had been carried off by a Roman, whose name was Centurione. It is said that her hair was one of the most remarkable features of her beauty, and that Centurione, when he carried her away, kissed some of her tresses, and, with a touch of poetry, exclaimed: "It is these that enchain me, for lovelier locks have I never seen." Centurione would appear to have been really fond of Teverina, and in all probability she returned the feeling, so her captivity would not be very hard to bear; but her poor mother was in great distress on her behalf, for she did not know whether it was into kind or cruel hands that she had fallen, nor indeed whether she were alive or dead. She was, however, enlightened as to Teverina's fate in rather a

strange manner. One day, while at her prayers, she was so overcome with the thought of her daughter that she began to weep bitterly and bemoan her fate aloud, speaking of Teverina by name, and bewailing her own ignorance as to her whereabouts. Near to her at the time was a little serving-maid, who happened to know where Teverina was, and overhearing Belisca's lamentations she approached her, and told her all she knew. Belisca, with a heart full of joy, hastened at once to Catiline, and implored his aid to rescue her daughter; and Catiline went out with an armed force, and succeeded in capturing Centurione, so in a few days Teverina was clasped in her mother's arms. The remainder of the story is even more romantic and interesting.

Belisca seems to have been a very tender-hearted woman, and now that she knew her daughter to be safe she began to feel great compassion for Centurione, who was badly wounded, and she not only bound up his wounds and tended him until he was well, but she forgave him all the anxiety and suffering he had caused her, and more than that,

actually helped him to escape from Catiline. In doing so she also brought about other events far from her intention. The moment had come for Centurione to start, and he was already mounted on the horse provided for him by Belisca, when he asked as one last favour to be allowed to bid farewell to Teverina, and Belisca, in a weak moment, consented. As the girl came forward Belisca drew aside for a second, and then a most wonderful thing happened. Centurione stooped down from his horse as if to speak to Teverina, and the next moment he had seized her in his arms, and the horse had borne them both far away at a gallop. Belisca, who was powerless to stop them, promptly fainted, probably not only from dismay, but from fear of what Catiline would say when he should find how foolishly she had undone all the fruits of his efforts.

The further fate of Centurione and Teverina is not related; but probably they never returned to Fiesole, so Belisca's last sight of her beloved daughter may have been when she saw her whirled away by her lover from before her astonished eyes.

Catiline immediately started in pursuit when he heard what had happened with a thousand horse and two thousand infantry, and all his nobles and barons in attendance, but as he drew near to Centurione, and prepared to attack him, more important affairs than the capture of a Roman maiden claimed his attention, and caused him to give up the pursuit. For at this moment tidings were brought from Fiesole that an army under Julius Cæsar was advancing there to avenge the death of Fiorinus, and Catiline immediately hastened back to meet it. Thus Centurione and Teverina were left to their own devices.

Catiline reached Fiesole in time to defend it against the enemy; but the siege lasted for over two years, and in the end the town was taken. The victorious Romans then set to work to build another city lower down on the banks of the River Arno, and this city became Florence. The work of building was divided among various nobles, each one undertaking some important portion of the work. One, for instance, was to pave the streets, and another to furnish a water supply by aque-

ducts; another to make bricks and to build the city walls, and so on; and this brings us to a legend of how Florence came to be so called. In the first place, it was held out, as an incentive to those engaged in the building of the city to be quick with their work, that whoever should complete his first should be allowed to choose the name, and might if he liked have the honour of calling it after himself. This, however, served to defeat its own object, for it caused such striving to be first that no one could surpass another, and thus the whole work was finished simultaneously. The name of Floria was then bestowed upon the city, both in commemoration of the death on the site of the Roman General Fiorinus, and on account of the beautiful flowers which grew so profusely in the meadows surrounding it. Afterwards this name was changed into Firenze, a corruption of *enza fiorita*, or flowery sword, and thus we have the Italian name which it bears to the present day.

All this as to the origin of Florence and of her name is, as I have said before, more or less legend-

ary, but there is no doubt that Florence was founded by the Romans, and was during the first few centuries of her existence one of the numerous Roman colonies. The first important event in her history of which we have any authentic information is in the fifth century, when the Goths crossed the Alps and invaded Italy. In the year 405 A.D there was a great battle at Florence between them and the Romans under a general named Stilicho, in which the Romans were victorious and the leader of the Goths slain on the field. A century later Florence was again attacked by the Goths, who this time were led by their King, Totila, about which remarkable man some interesting stories are told. In some of the accounts of him he appears as most cruel and treacherous; but much that is said of him by the old chroniclers is not worthy of belief, since they confused him hopelessly with Attila the Hun, who called himself the Scourge of God, and by whom much of Italy was devastated, but who lived a century before the time of Totila, and never entered Florence at all.

One of these doubtful legends refers to the attack of Totila on Florence, where, seeing how well defended the town was, and despairing of ever taking it by fair means, he had recourse to foul ones.

In the first place, he persuaded the Florentines to open their gates to him by a false promise that he would help them against the neighbouring town of Pistoia, by which they were at this time much harassed, and, deceived by this, they lodged him and his followers in their very midst. All went well for a time, and Totila, in order to blind the Florentines, displayed the greatest friendliness to them, so the foolish people were quite deceived, and placed full confidence in him.

When he had thus succeeded in winning their trust he invited the leading citizens to be present at a great council, and all the most powerful Florentines accepted, proud of the honour, and quite unsuspicious of the wicked designs which Totila had made against them.

He had, in fact, prepared for them a reception of a most gruesome kind, and very different from anything they expected. As they reached the

door of the council-chamber they were admitted singly; but no man who once entered was ever seen by his companions again, and the door which closed behind them opened no more for their return. One by one they were slain, as, ignorant of the fate that had befallen those before, they followed in regular succession. The dead bodies were simply flung into the aqueduct which ran under the building, and the crimson stain which issued thence and dyed the waters of the Arno first revealed to the Florentines what fate had befallen their fellow-citizens. With horror-stricken souls they then discovered the trap in which they had been caught, for they were quite unprepared, and it was now too late to attempt any defence, while the enemy in their midst was fully armed. Thus, before they could effect any escape, the Florentines were massacred by the Goths, and the whole of the city destroyed. One building, however, they spared, and that was the octagonal church inlaid with marbles, formerly a temple dedicated to Mars, but changed since the introduction of Christianity into the cathedral of

S. John. This building was the object of affectionate reverence with the Florentines through many succeeding generations, and when in the thirteenth century the lofty proportions of the new cathedral dedicated to S. Mary of the Flowers rose beside it, the old cathedral was preserved as the Baptistery, and is still used for that purpose, every Florentine child being brought there in earliest infancy for baptism, to this day.

This story shows Totila in a repellent and barbaric light, but we have others which give much more pleasing and humane glimpses of him, and reveal him as one not devoid of Christian virtues and much impressed and influenced by Christian teaching.

At one time we find him seeking the advice of the holy monk S. Benedict in his lonely retreat on Monte Casino. The story goes that, in order to test the saint, Totila caused one of his chiefs to wear the royal robes and impersonate him, and that S. Benedict immediately discovered the deception, thus proving to the King that he was indeed gifted with holy and supernatural powers.

Totila then flung himself humbly at his feet, while S. Benedict did not hesitate to rebuke him severely for his past cruelties, and foretold much that would happen to him in the future.

A still more striking scene than this occurred in S. Peter's, Rome. Totila, who had conquered the city with his barbarians, had gone to pray before the high altar, and as he turned to leave the peaceful spot to once more join the strife he found his progress barred by Pelagius, the Bishop of Rome (the word Pope had not yet come into use), who stood before him, with the gospel in his hand. Outside was tumult and bloodshed, and in even the vestibule of the sacred edifice the soldiers of Totila were performing their work of slaughter; but here, near the very shrine of S. Peter, all was quiet as the warrior and priest stood face to face, the one armed with his sword, the other only with the message of peace. In brief, pathetic words Pelagius entreated the conqueror to have mercy; but the moment was one of the proudest which Totila had known, and the temptation to take advantage of it not to be resisted.

"And so now, Pelagius," he replied, with an insulting smile, "your pride condescends to become a suppliant!"

On the next words of Pelagius hung the fate of Rome, but he had the tact and prudence to answer wisely. Had he defied the proud spirit of the northern monarch Rome would in all probability have been put to the sword and flame ere nightfall, but he saw that his best course now lay in a dignified submission.

"I am a suppliant," he replied. "God has now made us your subjects, and as your subjects we are entitled to your mercy."

All that was noblest and most generous in Totila was touched by these words, and Rome was spared.

One other brief story connected with Totila is too pretty to omit. It relates that when he entered northern Italy and destroyed most of the towns there Modena was miraculously spared on account of the presence in it of a saintly bishop named Germignano. It seems that when Totila drew near the town it was completely concealed from him in some supernatural way, so that he

passed through it without ever seeing it or knowing that it was there; which miracle is recorded as a fact by good old George Villani, the Florentine chronicler, when writing his history eight centuries later.

CHAPTER II

A DRAMATIC CORONATION

AFTER the conquests of Totila little is known about Florence for more than two centuries. The Goths were succeeded in Italy by another northern race called the *lunga barba*, or long beards, a name afterwards corrupted into Lombards, but little of Florence is recorded under these barbarian rulers. Towards the end of the eighth century, however, we come to the great event from which modern history dates—the coronation at Rome in 800 of Charles, King of the Franks. This King, whose title of Charles the Great, or in Latin Carlos Magnus, is contracted in French into the one word Charlemagne, was called into Italy by the Pope to help in the defence of the Church against the constant attacks of the Lombard kings. Charles succeeded in defeating the Lombards, and on Christmas Day of the year 800 he attended Mass at S. Peter's, Rome,

when the great and memorable scene took place.

The present cathedral of S. Peter's was not built until many years after this, but the one which stood there must also have been a fine and imposing building. It was in the shape of a hall supported by rows of Corinthian columns and adorned with sparkling mosaics. At one end, beyond this great central space, a flight of steps led to the high altar, behind which sat the clergy, on seats rising one above the other, to the Papal throne, where, from their midst, the Pope could command a view of the whole building. On this memorable occasion of Christmas Day 800 it was packed with people. The Pope, Leo III., was on the throne, the attendant priests grouped below in their places, and before the altar knelt the King, humbly clad in a chlamys, or short cloak, and the white tunic of a simple Roman citizen.

Whether he were prepared or not for the great scene immediately to take place is not certain, but probably he was not, and it would be as much a surprise to him as to the assembled multitude.

The service proceeded as usual to the end of the reading of the day's gospel; then the Pope rose, and slowly descending from his throne, in view of the vast congregation, placed the imperial crown of Rome on the brow of the kneeling monarch.

Immediately there arose a shout from a thousand throats, and the words, "Long live Charles, crowned by God as the great and pacific Emperor of the Romans!" resounded through the building, to be caught up and re-echoed by the hosts of Charles's own followers outside.

It was thus that the Roman Empire was revived in the west, and Charles became the first of a long line of Emperors, who were theoretically elected, though the office became in time to a large extent hereditary, and was practically identical with that of King of Germany, both of which offices being from 1154 retained for more than a hundred years by the Hohenstaufen family.

Five years after his coronation the new Emperor kept Easter in Florence, when he knighted a number of citizens, and thus first created an

aristocracy in the town. He also established a new government there, and pronounced it a free commune.

This entire freedom did not, however, last long, for Charles the Great's son and successor declared Florence, with all the towns of Tuscany, to be subject to the Emperor, and he instituted a line of counts to rule over the province of Tuscany, of which Florence was the principal town. In spite of this, however, these Italian towns each had their own separate and independent existence, and the growth of republicanism in their midst slowly continued during the three hundred years while they formed part of the dominion of these counts.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST VICTORY

In the year 1010 occurred the first great event in the history of Florence as an independent state. The ancient town of Fiesole had up to then maintained a separate and individual existence, quite distinct from that of the more modern town below; but by this year, 1010, Florence had much increased in power and size, and it was now determined by the Florentines that they would take the fortress of Fiesole, and make the place their own. This they accomplished, but in a manner not very much more creditable than the one by which Totila had succeeded in conquering the Florentines themselves, for, not venturing to attack the venerable city on its steep hill by force, they had recourse to treachery and stratagem.

The first step they took was to conclude peace with Fiesole, in consequence of which both the Fiesolans and the Florentines ceased to guard

their towns. The gates were allowed to stand open, so that intercourse between the inhabitants was perfectly free and uninterrupted, and peace and harmony apparently reigned between them. For some considerable time the Florentines allowed this state of things to last, so as to encourage the trust and confidence of the Fiesolans, and put them completely off their guard, while at the same time designs against them were being quietly formed.

The opportunity chosen to carry these out was the feast of S. Romolo, the patron saint of Fiesole, which was always made the occasion of a holiday ; special services were held in the churches, to be followed by general festivity, and merry gatherings of relations and friends.

On the eve of this festival, as the dark shadows of night crept over the hill of Fiesole, little bands of young Florentines fully armed might have been seen stealing under the cypress trees and hiding in sheltered places outside the gates. The Fiesolans, however, were too completely unsuspicious to be on the watch, and those warlike groups were

quite unnoticed by them. They made their preparations for the morrow's feast, and went quietly to bed as usual.

All that night the Florentines lay concealed, and when the bustle of the fête began, among the crowds of citizens passing through the streets in holiday attire to attend mass at the cathedral, it caused no surprise to see many Florentines bent apparently on keeping the feast with their neighbours. Nor was it perceived that beneath their innocent and friendly appearance each of these Florentines was fully armed. Gradually, instead of congregating towards the cathedral, they might have been seen forming little groups on various parts of the walls which surrounded the town, and from the walls stealing quietly on to the towers, now left unguarded by the Fiesolans in their fancied security. While the Fiesolans were in the cathedral and other churches engaged in the sacred services, signals were made from these towers to other armed Florentines, who were keeping a watch on the walls from the plains below, and in response to them these also hurried up to Fiesole,

so that soon a really large body of armed Florentines was within the walls quite unknown to the inhabitants. Service over, the Fiesolans returned to their homes, and proceeded to enjoy their midday meal and make merry with their families. So completely unaware were they of the danger in their midst that when their feasts were interrupted by a sudden rush of armed men from the surrounding rocks and thickets, they at first thought it only some slight affray of the peasantry who had flocked in from outside for the festival, and paid no attention to it.

Then suddenly was heard the shouts of soldiers and the trampling of steeds and the cries and groans of the wounded and dying, and too late the Fiesolans perceived what had befallen them, and that the enemy was in their midst. In a moment the feast was abandoned, and with a rush the men poured out from their homes, and flocked to their citadel, but it was too late ; the Florentines were there before them, and Fiesole was taken.

From this time Fiesole became a part of Florence, and most of the conquered Fiesolans settled there under her rule, and this largely increased her power and importance.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT COUNTESS

In the earlier half of the eleventh century the reigning Count of Tuscany was a certain Boniface III., noted for his cruelty and extravagance. He is said to have shown no mercy, and to have cut off the noses and ears of his enemies out of sheer love of inflicting suffering; while, in proof of his extravagance, it is related that he had his horses shod with silver, that at his wedding feast he had wine drawn from wells by silver buckets and chains, and that, when on one occasion the Emperor, who was visiting him, praised a certain vinegar, he sent him a gift of a small quantity placed in a silver vessel drawn by two oxen harnessed to a silver car.

In 1052 Boniface was murdered, and the whole of his vast dominions passed to his only child, the Countess Matilda, then at the early age of six. Little Matilda had a troubled childhood. Her

mother, whose name was Beatrice, was a good woman, and anxious to manage her little daughter's large estates wisely and well until she should be of an age to rule over them herself, but soon after her father's death Matilda was deprived for a time of her mother's personal care.

Beatrice, following the advice of the Pope as well as her own inclinations, was married for a second time to a man named Godfrey of Lorraine. This led to great difficulties, for, satisfied with the Pope's consent, she had not also obtained that of the Emperor, Henry III., and he immediately strongly opposed the marriage, and declared that Godfrey was an enemy to Italy, and that it must be annulled. But Beatrice refused to be separated from the husband of her choice for even the commands of an Emperor, and when Henry discovered this he played a cruel trick upon her. He invited her into his dominions under promise of a safe escort, and when, trusting to his word, Beatrice arrived there, he at once cast her into prison, where she might have spent the remainder of her life far away from her husband and child if the

death of her enemy had not unexpectedly liberated her. Henry was succeeded by his son, Henry IV., but as he was only five years old at the time of his father's death his mother, the Empress Agnes, was appointed Regent, and she at once released Beatrice, and allowed her to return to Matilda. Little could either mother imagine the great scene by which, many years after, these two children, both left heirs so early to large dominions, would play a part, causing their names ever after to be associated. Matilda was eight years old when her mother returned to her, and much of her future greatness as a ruler is no doubt due to the careful training which Beatrice now gave her. Quite early in life she was taught to take an active interest in the government of her country, and in the judicial courts of Florence the girl-countess and her mother were to be seen presiding in state, and administering justice from the throne, round which were seated the wealthy landowners, together with judges, assessors, and all other legal and civic dignitaries.

An even more remarkable part than this was,

however, played at an early age by Matilda in her country's history, for when fifteen we find her appearing in arms against the enemies of the Church. This championship of the Papal cause was carried on in other ways later in life, and in the great struggle between Pope and Emperor which took place during her reign Matilda gave the Church all the powerful support which her wealth and position enabled her to afford.

The little boy, who, under the title of Henry IV., had succeeded his father as King of Germany and Roman Emperor, grew up to be the bitter enemy of the Pope Gregory VII., perhaps better known by the name of Hildebrand, which was the one he bore before his election to the Papal chair.

The main point of contention was the great question of investiture, as to whether with the Church or with the laity rested the right of investing priests to any sacred office; and when in the year 1075 Gregory declared at a meeting in Rome that not even the Emperor had this power, and that it rested with the clergy alone, it was

equivalent to a declaration of open warfare and enmity between them.

At a great council held by Henry at Worms, Gregory was accused of various crimes, and declared to be no longer Pope. In return Gregory summoned a meeting at Rome, and there deposed and excommunicated Henry. The Emperor's thunderbolt against the Pope had little effect. Not so the sentence of the Pope against the Emperor. The man, who could not only punish in the present, but was supposed to have power over the future life of the soul in his hands, was armed with a weapon that even monarchs could not command. Henry found himself deserted by his followers, forsaken by other rulers, and at last, from fear of really losing his crown, he was brought to the point of humbling himself before his enemy and craving his forgiveness.

For this purpose he set out, accompanied by a few faithful followers and by his wife and infant son, to cross the Alps and plead with the Pope in person. The journey was one of great difficulty, for not only was it winter, and a winter of unusual

severity, but the easier mountain passes were guarded by Papal troops, and the less frequented and more perilous one of Mont Cenis had to be chosen. The Emperor arrived there to find himself confronted by a mass of fallen snow, which had not yet hardened enough to be safe, and a passage over which was impossible. Mountaineers were employed to cut a rough road through it, but when the royal party reached the summit of the pass an even worse prospect lay before them. The descent on the southern side was little better than a sheer precipice of ice. Yet even this dangerous journey was accomplished. By creeping on their hands and knees, by clinging to the shoulders of the more surefooted guides, by even rolling, Henry and his little band at length reached the plains.

The Queen and the infant prince were placed in the skins of oxen, and thus dragged down as in a sledge. But the poor horses fared the worst on that perilous journey; many of them had their feet tied together, and were allowed to roll from ledge to ledge, to arrive at the bottom more often than

not so seriously injured as to be useless. However, the journey was accomplished at last, and Henry entered Italy.

The Pope was at Mantua at the time, accompanied by his ardent supporter the Countess Matilda, and on hearing of the Emperor's arrival both withdrew to her Castle of Canossa, there to await events, and to see whether it were as an invader or a suppliant that the Emperor had come. It thus happened that it was in Matilda's castle that the great meeting between the Pope and Emperor eventually took place.

This Castle of Canossa, of which now only a few ruins remain, had a position which would have rendered it very difficult to take in case of an attack. It was perched on the summit of a bare eminence of white rock which formed a spur of the Apennines. Around it towered other crags and peaks of the range, and below lay a fertile valley watered by the Po. The building itself was on a narrow ledge, which was barely large enough to hold it, and was protected by three walls. The first of these was at the foot of

the hill; the second half way up its steep sides, where a drawbridge spanned the chasm; the third was on the summit, and encircled the castle. At the entrance to these outer walls arrived Henry with his band of nobles and followers; and the Pope, soon perceiving that it was not as a defiant monarch, but as a humble suppliant, that his enemy had come, remained enclosed within the castle, and with haughty arrogance refused to receive him. Matilda was then called upon to play the part of intercessor. Henry obtained an interview with her, and, working on her womanly pity and kindness of heart, he succeeded in persuading her to plead with Gregory on his behalf.

Accompanied by the Abbot of Clugny, who was said to have great influence with Gregory, the Countess sought an audience of him, and entreated him to take pity on the penitent Emperor, and remove the sentence of excommunication against him, giving him at the same time many promises of submission which Henry had charged her to make for him. All her pleading was in vain. Gregory's stern, relentless nature was untouched,

and in reply he said coldly that if Henry's repentance were genuine he should have placed all the signs of royal dignity in his hands, and that only on the condition that he did so, and at the same time declared himself unworthy to rule, would he forgive him.

Even Henry's humility was hardly likely to submit to such a test as this. The Abbot took up Matilda's pleading, and implored the Pope to have mercy, begging him to "spare so bruised a reed," and grant forgiveness to the Emperor, who awaited it so humbly outside the gates. At last the concession that he would receive the penitent was wrung from the haughty pontiff, and the Abbot returned joyfully to take the message to Henry, little guessing what cruel plan for further humiliating him was still to be carried out by the Pope.

The next day a striking scene took place. The greatest monarch of Europe, the descendant of kings and emperors, approached the outer walls of the Castle of Canossa clad in the thin white robes of a penitent and bearing no sign of rank or royalty about him.

It was a bitterly cold day in this unusually severe winter, and the snow lay thick on the ground over which the royal penitent had to pass with naked feet. The outer wall was reached, and here the gates were to be opened and Henry admitted within. The ascent of the steep mountain path was then begun, and Henry arrived at the second gate thinking that the end of his toilsome pilgrimage was within measurable distance. But here, contrary to all expectations, and to his utter dismay, he found the gate closed in his face, and further progress denied him. Gregory's orders for admission had not extended beyond the outer walls, and here, on the territory of his ally the Countess, his commands were all-powerful, and even the Emperor must await his pleasure. The day wore on, and still at the unopened gates stood the tall and imposing figure of the Emperor in the plain white robe; the voice which had been accustomed to utter commands, the slightest of which none dared disobey, now reduced to humble pleading in vain; the handsome countenance and flashing eye, which had so often roused the enthusi-

asm of friends, or struck terror into the hearts of foes, now bent and subdued. The cold grew still more intense as the sun sank behind the mountains and the short winter day drew to its close; while, to add to his sufferings, the Emperor had fasted since the previous day in preparation for the sacred service which he had hoped ere this would have pronounced him absolved and forgiven. Surely, he may well have thought, Gregory's triumph and revenge would have been sufficiently satisfied, and before nightfall he would let him in. It was not, however, so. Through all the rigour of that winter night the royal suppliant stood at the gate of Canossa, barefooted, thinly clad, fasting, while but a short distance away his enemy enjoyed the warmth and shelter of the castle. Dawn broke on the motionless figure still waiting at the barred gate, and another day of weary waiting and disappointed hope passed over him, and even yet Gregory showed no signs of relenting. Yet a third day dawned and passed and wore on to evening, and then Henry's fortitude gave way. Forsaking the post where he had suffered so much

and waited so patiently he now retraced his steps, and passed once more outside the precincts of the castle to a chapel beyond the walls. Here he was met by the Abbot of Clugny and by Matilda, and with bitter tears he implored the former to intercede again with the Pope, and to put an end to his suffering. Matilda, though so staunch a supporter of the Church, was too tender-hearted not to be touched by Henry's condition, and she added her prayers to his; whereupon the Abbot, knowing that greater than any other influence with the Pope was that of Matilda herself, turned to her with the words:

"It is thou alone who can accomplish this."

Henry seized at once on this hope, and, throwing himself on his knees before the Countess, he entreated her with a passion of tears to help him. So it was Matilda who once more sought the Pope. What arts of womanly pleading and what tender arguments she used we do not know, but she at length caused Gregory's hardness to melt, and he consented to receive the Emperor. Even now, however, it was only after Henry, broken down by

his long vigil, had given in on every point required of him that the Pope condescended to grant him absolution.

One more scene, too striking and dramatic to omit, took place that day within the walls of Canossa. At the celebration of the Mass which followed the Pope's forgiveness of Henry, Gregory summoned him to the High Altar, then, raising the consecrated Host in his hands, he called upon God to strike him dead then and there if he were guilty of any of the acts of which the Emperor had accused him at Worms. In the pause of awestruck expectancy that followed, he calmly took and ate the sacred wafer, then turned to Henry with the words: "My son, do thou as I have done."

But Henry, unnerved perhaps by the terrible experience through which he had so lately passed, and with a conscience less clear than that of the Pope, refused to submit to such a test, preferring instead to be cleared of the charges against him at a general council. To this Gregory agreed, though with some reluctance. The service was continued, and when

over he condescended to receive his absolved penitent at a great banquet. Thus these two great enemies were at least outwardly and for the moment reconciled.

The Countess Matilda died in 1115, and as she had had no children, though twice married, she left the whole of her vast wealth to the Church she had served so loyally, and this, the most important donation since that of Charlemagne, greatly added to its power, though it was also the cause of much future dissension and warfare between the Popes and the Emperors, who also claimed a large portion of it.

As regards her own dominion of Tuscany, a pleasing proof of the regard in which Matilda was held by her subjects there is found in the name "Tessa," short for Contessa, which became a favourite Christian name for Florentine girls in memory of the great lady who had borne her title so well.

CHAPTER V

GUALDRADA AND THE COUNTS GUIDI

With the death of Matilda the line of counts of Tuscany ended, and from this time the independence of Florence became established. In consequence of her growing importance enemies naturally arose against her, and among these was the powerful family of the Counts Guidi, who were of German origin, and are said to have come into Italy during the tenth century with the Emperor Otho I., who gave to them the lordship of Modigliana, a part of the large province of Romagna. In time their possessions spread closer and closer to Florentine territory; and the Florentines, growing jealous of their increasing power, combined with the neighbouring state of Pisa in war against them, while the towns of Siena and Arezzo allied themselves with the counts. Many fierce fights took place in consequence.

It is, however, not particulars of these, but a

romantic incident which brought Florence and the counts into more friendly relations, that is about to be related. In the first place, however, a tragic page in the history of the counts must be mentioned.

In their own territory of Romagna the tyranny and general misrule of the Guidi at length caused an insurrection, in which the whole of the people rose up against them and slew every member of the family, men, women, and even children, with one exception. This one exception was a little boy, who happened to be in the country with his nurse at the time, and thus by a mere accident escaped the general massacre, and he lived to grow up and to continue his race. In commemoration of the awful tragedy which deprived him of his kindred he was given the surname of Bevesangue (blood-drinker). It is about his marriage with Gualdrada Berti, a Florentine maiden, that the following picturesque story is told by the chronicler.[1]

[1] There is, however, a difference of opinion among historians as to whether it was Bevesangue or a descendant who married Gualdrada.

It appears that when the Emperor Otho IV. passed through Florence in 1210 all the fair ladies of the city were assembled to do him honour, but among them none so fair as Gualdrada, daughter of Bellincione Berti,[1] one of the most important and deservedly respected citizens, whose great beauty, as well as her modest demeanour, especially attracted the Emperor's admiration. Bellincione, flattered by the Emperor's compliments, and anxious to please him, said that he would bid Gualdrada to allow herself to be kissed by him.

Gualdrada, however, received her father's orders with maidenly indignation and scorn, and declared that by no man but her lawful husband, not even by the Emperor himself, would she allow such a liberty to be taken, and Bellincione, much crestfallen, had to convey her refusal to Otho. The Emperor, however, seems to have had a generous and noble nature, and instead of being angered

[1] Dante by the mouth of his ancestor Cacciaguida, Bellincione's contemporary, quotes him as an example of the simple, homely style of dressing in Florence at that day. See Paradiso XV. 112-15.

he was pleased and touched by this proof that Gualdrada's fair body held a pure and noble spirit, and he soon took an opportunity to show his approval of her conduct. Among his followers present on this occasion was Count Guido Bevesangue, and he also was much struck by Gualdrada's beauty and modesty, and fell desperately in love with her on the spot. The gulf which separated so high a noble from the daughter of a simple though wealthy citizen was, however, a very wide one, and it was doubtful if the Count would have been able to marry Gualdrada if the Emperor had withheld his support.

This, however, Otho not only gave, but he actually encouraged as well as sanctioned the marriage, and considered that, in spite of her comparatively humble birth, Gualdrada had shown herself well worthy to fill the position of a countess.

So Gualdrada married the great Count, and in time her father's wealth passed to her, and thus added to the possessions of the Guido family. A line of counts was descended from her, and one

of them will be encountered several times in later pages of these stories, though one regrets to add that he does not prove himself a very worthy descendant of his ancestress, and cuts a figure more ridiculous than heroic.

CHAPTER VI

A TRAGIC WEDDING DAY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

It was shortly before the marriage of Gualdrada and Guido, as related in the last chapter, that another betrothal took place in Florence which, though between two private citizens, had results of the most important nature on the public history of the state, since it led to a feud by which the city was divided for many years, and was the cause of much misery and bloodshed.

But first must be related the events of which the betrothal was the outcome. In the year 1205 a certain young Florentine knight named Tegrini invited a party of his friends to a feast at a country villa a few miles outside the town. A large company assembled, the tables were spread, and all went merrily, until an unfortunate incident gave rise to hot feeling, and eventually led to a quarrel. The family jester was present, and, in accordance with the custom of the time, endeav-

oured to add to the entertainment by jests and buffoonery, which were well received as a rule, liberties being permitted from one of this profession which would never have been tolerated from anyone else. On this occasion, however, he seems to have chosen the victim for one of his practical jokes badly, and when he suddenly seized a plate of roast larks from before young Uberto, who was about to eat from it, exciting the mirth of those present at his discomfiture, Uberto himself took the jest in bad part, and made an offensive reply. At this up sprang another guest, named Oddo, and, indignant at Uberto's lack of good humour, reproved him for it in no measured terms; whereupon Uberto gave further vent to his temper by seizing the plate and flinging its contents in Oddo's face. Here was a pretty scene for a feast of merrymakers! The whole table was, of course, in an uproar at once, tongues were loosened, knives were produced, and in the general skirmish Oddo was severely wounded by young Buondelmonte, a friend of Uberto's, and a member of one of the most important families in

Florence. Thus ended the first part of this affair; but it was by no means at an end altogether, and ill feeling had been created which would need by some means or other to be wiped out before peace could be restored.

Soon after the day of the feast a party of the wounded Oddo's friends met to take counsel together as to the best course to be pursued for this object, and the decision arrived at was that, in order to re-establish the friendly relations of the two families concerned, Buondelmonte should marry a daughter of the Amidei, who was a niece of the man he had wounded. This matter was soon amicably arranged, both Buondelmonte himself and the family of the proposed bride were quite willing to consent, and the story would probably have ended there had it not been for an incident which changed everything.

There was living in Florence at this time a widow named Aldruda Donati, whom these plans for reconciliation did not please at all, for she had made up her mind that Buondelmonte should marry her own beautiful young daughter, and even

now she would not give up this cherished scheme. One day soon after his betrothal, as young Buondelmonte rode past her house, he suddenly found himself addressed by these words :

" Unworthy knight ! Hast thou accepted a wife through fear ? Leave her, and choose this fair damsel in her place, and be henceforth a brave and honoured gentleman ! "

Startled by the taunt and the suggestion it conveyed Buondelmonte naturally reined in his horse, and as he did so Aldruda flung open her door, and from within the exquisite loveliness of her daughter burst on the young man's gaze.

" Alas ! " he cried, with a sigh of regret as he viewed the prize he had missed, " it is now too late."

But Aldruda had her answer ready.

" Not so," she said in an eager whisper ; " thou canst yet have her. Dare but to take her to wife ! "

This challenge to his courage put young Buondelmonte's prudence to flight, and casting aside all thoughts of the promised bride, for whom he

could hardly be expected to have had much feeling of affection, he replied, "I do dare," and, with these words, resolved at all costs to marry Aldruda's daughter.

On the very day originally fixed for his marriage with Oddo's niece the valiant young knight, putting all rules of caution to defiance, was seen by friends and foes alike riding through the streets of Florence on his way to bear a ring of betrothal to the new bride of his choice. Such an open insult was hardly likely to be passed over in silence by the family of the deserted maiden, and that same evening they gathered together at one of the churches. In that supposed place of peace a vow of deadly vengeance was taken, and various methods of punishing Buondelmonte were discussed, and eventually put aside in favour of more severe measures. By one it was suggested that he should be dragged through the mud, by another that he should be waylaid and beaten, by a third that his handsome face should be gashed and disfigured. At last the murderous plan which was probably present in every mind found expression from one

named Mosca de' Lamberti, who interrupted the discussion with the significant words:

"Beat or wound him as ye list, but first prepare your own graves, for wounds bring equal consequence with death. Let the thing be done once and for all."

By this Mosca meant that the after results to themselves would be as serious, and as likely to cause their death, if they only wounded Buondelmonte, as if they killed him. Therefore it was better to do the thing out and out at once and finish it. His meaning could not fail to be understood by his associates, and a cruel plot to carry it out was at once laid.

The Easter Day of that same year 1215 was the one fixed for the wedding of Buondelmonte with Aldruda's daughter, and on that morning he rode forth gaily and carelessly in the bright sunshine to meet his bride, a conspicuous figure, whom none could mistake. He was mounted on a snow-white palfrey, and attired in a vest of fine white wool, with a white mantle thrown across his shoulders, and a wreath of roses on his head, in celebration of

the festive occasion. Did nothing give him a hint of the danger lurking near as, gaily and unattended, he rode forth? It would seem not.

On he rode as far as the old bridge across the Arno, and there, at the foot of the great statue of Mars which guarded the entrance, his enemies fell upon him.

All alone and unarmed as he was he had, of course, no chance of escape. In a moment one of the Uberti had unhorsed him; the knives of Mosca and of Lambertuccio, the father of the deserted bride, were plunged into his prostrate body; and finally one named Oderigo completed the bloody work by cutting his throat. The corpse was left where it had fallen, the white garments marked with crimson stains, and the garland of roses in the dust, while the murderers fled from the scene of their crime. All the larger houses in Florence at this time were guarded by strong towers, for purposes of protection and defence in case of warfare, and to the one belonging to the Amidei family they withdrew for safety. Such a precaution was not unneeded, for Florence

was stirred to a state of frenzied indignation by the foul deed just perpetrated, and a pathetic scene which followed the murder served further to excite feelings of wrath and revenge. The young daughter of the Donati, thus cruelly deprived of her bridegroom on the very day of her expected marriage, was placed by her friends on a high seat, and at her feet was laid the bier containing the body of the murdered Buondelmonte, whose head, still crowned with the wedding wreath, rested on her knee. Thus in their wedding attire bride and bridegroom were borne together through the streets of Florence, as a proclamation to all of the evil deed and an appeal for revenge. The feeling aroused that day did not soon die out, and the murder of Buondelmonte was the beginning of strife and bloodshed, which lasted more than thirty years, in Florence. The whole town became divided into parties—thirty-nine of the leading families taking part with the family of Buondelmonte and of his bride, and thirty-three with that of the injured Amidei. Later this party feud became involved with the greater one which

was distracting Italy, that between the Guelphs or adherents of the Pope, and the Ghibellines or adherents of the Emperor. The Buondelmonti sided with the Guelphs; while the Amidei and Uberti took the part of the Ghibellines, and supported the imperial cause. In 1239 an attempt at reconciling the two hostile parties in marriage was again made, and again failed, though with not quite such tragic circumstances as before. One of the Uberti family, named Neri Piccolino, took as wife a beautiful and accomplished lady of the Buondelmonti, and on the strength of this relationship some of the Uberti went with their friends to pay a visit to one of the bride's family. The reception they met with was not encouraging to further visits, for on arriving at the house they were attacked, and driven away even with bloodshed, and the conflict broke out still more fiercely than before. The poor young wife of Neri Piccolino suffered much in consequence, for her husband was so greatly incensed by this treacherous conduct on the part of her relations that he declared he would have nothing more to do with

her, and she was sent back to her father's house. There even worse troubles awaited her, for notwithstanding the fact that she had been already married, and that her husband was alive, her father insisted on her marrying another man of his choice. The poor lady, having found all her prayers and entreaties to her father of no avail, could only throw herself on the mercy of the husband he had chosen for her. Fortunately, he was generous-minded enough to listen to her pleading, and to grant her wish that she should retire to a convent, where she ended her days in retirement.

CHAPTER VII

STORY OF A PET DOG, OF AN EMPEROR'S SUSPICION, AND OF A HERO'S BURIAL

IT is necessary before going any further to give a brief general idea of the government of Florence at this time. In the early days of her independence it had been in the hands of consuls and councils, but in the year 1207 an important change was made by the institution of the Podestà as chief magistrate. This officer was generally chosen from some other town instead of from among the Florentines themselves; the office was elective, and the same man only held it for a year, or sometimes even less. His position was something similar to that of our mayors, if one can imagine a mayor ruling over an independent state. The Podestà was assisted in the government by councils, and later by *Anziani* (or elders), who were chosen by election from among the citizens, and two of whom represented each of the six divisions

or wards of the town. In time these elders were replaced by priors, who were elected for two months only. Later there was also an officer, called the Captain of the People, who was supposed to act as a sort of check on the Podestà.

But the feuds and strifes which took place within the walls of Florence were by no means her only battles at this period. Besides her own internal or family quarrels she had to take part in the history of the whole country, and as she grew in power and importance quarrels between her and neighbouring states, which like herself had struggled into independent existence, were frequent.

One of these quarrels arose from a ridiculously small incident, and began over a pet dog.

In the year 1220 Rome was in great festival for the coronation of the Emperor Frederick II., who was not only Emperor and King of Germany, but had also inherited from his mother Constance the two kingdoms of the island of Sicily, and of that part of southern Italy called Naples, and which is often included with Sicily, the two together being called "the two Sicilies." Frederick had come

then to Rome to receive from the Pope that imperial crown without which no emperor was considered to have really assumed the office, and in those days, as in these, it was customary for ambassadors representing the various states and governments to be present at the coronation. Among these were, of course, some from Florence, and also from her near neighbour and rival power, the important maritime town of Pisa. It happened that the Florentine ambassador was visiting the house of a certain Cardinal, and that there he saw and took a great fancy to a beautiful little pet dog, and asked the Cardinal to allow him to have it as a gift. The Cardinal gave a courteous assent, and the matter was so far settled. But the next day the Pisan ambassador came to visit the same Cardinal, and he also took such a fancy to the pet dog that he asked to have it, and again the Cardinal, apparently forgetting his promise of the day before, consented. No sooner had the Pisan ambassador gone home than a messenger from the Florentine came to claim the dog, which was handed over to him to take back to his master. When in due

course, therefore, the Pisan ambassador sent with the same object, there was no dog to give him, and a pretty dilemma ensued. The Pisan, in great wrath, sent to the Florentine, declaring that the dog had been given to him, and demanding that it should be handed over to him at once; but this the Florentine refused to do, with good grounds, since the dog had been given to him first. So hot did feeling grow over the matter that it led to fighting. Nor did the matter end in Rome; the Pisan ambassador referred the matter to his government when he returned home to Pisa, and, in revenge on the Florentines, they seized all the Florentine merchandise within their reach. The result of this was a declaration of war between Florence and Pisa. The Florentines were victorious in a great battle, which ended the matter for the time, but left the flame of discord still smouldering, and ready to break out again at the least provocation.

Meanwhile other events outside the walls of Florence were destined to sweep her also into their tide, and she was called upon to play her

subordinate part in the great drama which had the Pope and the Emperor for its principal characters. The strife between these two most important offices in Europe had by no means been ended by the great reconciliation scene of Canossa, and it again reached an acute stage in the reign of Frederick II., who spent his time in alternately defying and conciliating the Pope, who in his turn alternately excommunicated and forgave him.

Frederick himself is one of the most interesting figures in history. He was of German birth, being the son of the Emperor Henry VI., and grandson of Frederick Barbarossa; but his mother Constance was an Italian, and from her he not only inherited his large Sicilian dominions, but much that was southern in his temperament, and with the courage and love of warfare bequeathed to him by a line of warriors he united a taste for the gentler arts of poetry and music. At his picturesque court, beneath the burning sun of Sicily, where he loved to spend most of his time, he not only sang love songs, but himself wrote them and encouraged his courtiers to do

the same, and from these came some of the earliest utterances of Italian verse. One of the most noted of these poet courtiers was the chancellor Piero delle Vigne, whose verse ranked among the best of his day, but whose name is associated with a tragic story that does not reflect well on his imperial master. For some time Piero was in high favour with Frederick, who trusted much to him, and treated him as a friend; but a plot was discovered to poison the Emperor, and suspicion was cast on Piero of being implicated in it. It is supposed by the poet Dante, who relates part of the story in his Inferno, that Piero was really innocent, and that the other courtiers had accused him out of jealousy for the favour shown to him by Frederick; but in any case the Emperor's faith in him was so shaken that he had him cast into prison, when, according to some accounts, his eyes were burnt out as a punishment. The unfortunate chancellor took his loss of favour and punishment so much to heart that he hanged himself.[1]

In the year 1245 the Florentines found their

[1] See Dante, Inferno XIII. 58-64.

growing independence threatened by Frederick. He was at open warfare at the time with Pope Innocent IV., by whom he had been excommunicated and deposed, and he formed a plan to drive all the Guelphs or Papal adherents out of Florence, so as to obtain complete power over this important town. With this object he entered into correspondence with the Uberti, who were among the leading Ghibellines, and being of German origin themselves had special sympathies with the imperial cause. This served as a match to the old party strife in Florence, which was always ready to burst into flame. Civil war, with all its horrors, broke out afresh; shops were closed, houses barricaded; camps sprang up in every quarter of the town; all peaceful occupations ceased, and every man became a soldier. Hand-to-hand fights took place; neighbours living side by side plunged daggers into each other's breasts; women saw those dearest to them on earth slain before their eyes. No feasts, no weddings, no amusements were held: the whole town was given over to warfare and death.

While the strife was at its hottest, and none could have said which side would ultimately win, the arrival of Frederick, King of Antioch, a natural son of the Emperor's, with an armed force soon turned the tide in favour of the Ghibellines. An overwhelming majority bore down on the sturdy Guelphs, driving them before them from position after position, until further resistance was hopeless, and a retreat was called. But at the moment of flight news was brought to these gallant warriors which caused all thoughts of self-preservation to be put aside. Through all the heavy fighting of that day none had borne his part more bravely than their leader, Rustico Marignolli. Now he was overcome at last, and lay pierced by a Ghibelline arrow at the foot of one of their towers. Left thus to the mercy of his enemies the body would, in accordance with the barbarous customs of the day, have been dragged with every indignity through the streets, and flung without Christian burial in the Arno. To avoid this the Guelphs plunged back to where he lay, and then in solemn procession, with battered shields and trailing

banners, blood-stained and weary from the fight, they bore the corpse of their hero to the church of San Lorenzo, and gave it honourable burial there. In their stout hearts not pity for his fate dwelt, but rather envy for his honourable death, mixed with feelings of vengeance against the foe. Some of the younger and more hot-headed wished now at once to plunge back into the fight and to die as Rustico had done, but their impulsive wish was kept in check by those whose years taught them to look farther ahead. Not by such means would the Guelph interest be best supported. The Republic might pass for a time into the hands of the Emperor; but the cause of freedom was not hopelessly lost, and the day might come when she would again summon all her Guelph sons to her aid. Animated by this hope the army of Guelphs quietly withdrew to the outside country, and Florence was left for a time to the Ghibellines.

CHAPTER VIII

MIRACLE OF THE FALLING TOWER AND STORY OF THE TREACHEROUS SHOEMAKER

THE Ghibellines were no sooner left in undisputed possession of Florence than they proceeded to destroy all the palaces and mansions which had belonged to the Guelphs, thus causing much indignation among the citizens, who were justly proud of their fine buildings. There was one house in particular, known from its magnificence as the Palace, the destruction of which specially excited their anger. It stood about one hundred and fifty feet high, and both it and the tower of defence belonging to it were adorned with beautiful columns of costly marbles. But an act which caused even more resentment was the destruction by the Ghibellines of a tower, venerated not only on account of its beauty, but because it guarded the entrance to the square of S. John's, where the greatest Florentines of the past had been buried,

and for which reason it was called Guardamorto, or Guard the Dead. It was now not only resolved by the ruthless Ghibellines to pull down this tower, but they further conceived the infamous plan that by its fall it should crush the revered cathedral of S. John's also.

All was made ready, the foundations of the lofty tower were cut away on the side nearest the cathedral, and short wooden props placed there to which fire was to be set; and how it happened that S. John's escaped being crushed by the fall must be told in the words of the old chronicler, himself.

"But," so he says, "as it pleased God, by reverence and miracle of the blessed S. John, the tower which was one hundred and twenty cubits in height, made manifest when it came to fall, that it would avoid the holy church, and turning round, fell straight into the square, whereupon all the Florentines marvelled and the people rejoiced greatly."

Thus does Villani account for the apparent miracle, but it has been suggested by later his-

torians that the great sculptor and architect, Niccola Pisano, who was entrusted with the arrangements, may have had something to do with it, and that this marvellous turning of the tower in mid-air may have been partly due to his designs.

This destruction of the Guelph buildings was only the beginning of the Ghibelline unpopularity. The haughty arrogance with which these nobles ruled the city, and the heavy taxes they imposed on the people, caused a growing discontent among them, and outside events served to foster and encourage the spirit of revolt.

The Guelphs when driven from Florence had sought refuge in outlying fortresses, and thither the Ghibellines followed and attacked them. The first of these attacks on the fortress of Capraia, about fifteen miles from Florence, ended in a Ghibelline victory owing to the treachery of a Guelph shoemaker named Del Tosco. The besieged party had made so good a defence that the enemy were inclined to come to favourable terms with them, when Tosco, who was angry at not

being invited to attend a council held within the walls, rushed to the gates and cried out to the enemy that the condition of the place was really desperate and they could hold out no longer. On hearing this the Ghibellines refused to treat with the besieged, and, in the words of Villani, "they within surrendered themselves as dead men to the mercy of the Emperor." Little mercy, however, did these Guelphs meet with from the hands of Frederick, who took them with him into Naples, where he treated them with every cruelty, and eventually put them to death by drowning. Del Tosco was spared in the general capture, but a not much better fate awaited him from the hands of his own countrymen, for after he returned later on to Florence with the Guelph party, he was stoned by the people, and dragged even by the children along the ground and, finally, cast into the city moats.

The next attempted attack of the Ghibellines had a very different result from the one at Capraia, for while they were waiting at the small town of Figline near a fortress which held the Guelphs,

these latter crept out under cover of night and slew nearly all of them. Encouraged by this news when it reached them, the people of Florence rose up against the Ghibellines, who were driven to seek the shelter of their fortified houses. The government was next overturned, and in its place these people set up one of their own, in which the councils and the office of Podestà were for a time abolished, and the Captain of the People, and twelve elders representing twelve different parts of the city, were appointed instead.

It was at this time too that a large bell, called the Toscin, was attached to a tower in the centre of the town, and at the sound of it all the citizens were to make ready for war.

In the year 1250 then, Florence was entirely a democracy. In her midst the Ghibelline nobles were shut up behind the strong walls of their homes, whence they dared not venture forth, and in the country outside the Guelph leaders were still exiles. Another great event now occurred to further alter the situation.

On the 20th of December of that year, 1250,

dismay was struck to the hearts of the Ghibelline nobles by the news that the Emperor Frederick II. had died a few days previously. Early in the following month peace of a kind was made between the Imperial and Papal parties, and the Guelph exiles returned to Florence.

CHAPTER IX

MANFRED AND THE BOY KING

THE death of Frederick occurred at a little place in Southern Italy called Firenzuola, or little Florence.

He had always carefully avoided entering Florence itself on account of a prophecy which foretold that he would die there, and now it seemed as if a curious fate had caused the letter of this prophecy to be fulfilled.

According to the accounts of Villani, his death was not altogether due to natural causes, but was hastened by his son, Manfred, who, anxious to succeed to his father's property before he could make a will leaving it elsewhere, bribed the chamberlain to stifle the sick Emperor with a bolster.

Villani, however, was a Guelph, and some of his views of the Ghibelline leaders are apt to be a little prejudiced. If Manfred really committed

this base action, he was not only guilty of parricide but of disgraceful hypocrisy, for he had his father's body conveyed with great pomp to the church of Monreale, in the island of Sicily, and there placed over it a Latin epitaph which, roughly translated, runs thus: "If virtue, birth and truth, could death withhold, in sooth Frederick, who here doth lie, had never come to die."

Whatever Manfred's schemes may have been on the death of his father, the large inheritance left by the Emperor belonged by right to his legitimate heir Conrad, who, at the news of his father's death, hastened from Germany, where he was then living, to claim the Italian portion of his vast dominions. He crossed the Alps and arrived at Venice, where he caused a large fleet to be equipped, and thus came by sea to the town of Naples. He found it in a state of rebellion, and after subduing it, he proceeded farther into the kingdom and did the same to all other places which had, like Naples, declared for the Guelph side. But at the moment of triumph, when Conrad had regained his dominion and was generally acknowledged as king,

he was struck down by mortal sickness, caused, some said, by poison administered by his half-brother Manfred, but there is no proof that this was not one of those accusations so readily made in the Middle Ages to account for an unexpected death.

Conrad left an infant called Conradino (or little Conrad), who now inherited the throne of Germany and of the two Sicilies. On the death of his father, Conradino's mother, Elizabeth, retired with her little son to the court of her brother, Louis of Bavaria, and there the child was brought up. The Duke's castle was situated in beautiful scenery not far from the Lake of Constance, and the little king loved to roam among these picturesque surroundings, accompanied by his cousin, young Frederick of Austria, who, three years older than himself, was his favourite companion. The warm friendship between the boys was put to a test as they approached manhood, and in their subsequent tragic history the names of the two young princes are indelibly associated. Conradino was carefully guarded and educated by his mother, who was entirely devoted to him, and did her best through

the years when his youth enabled her to protect him, to act as a shield between him and the storms which not only raged in his kingdom, but must often have done so nearer at hand, for Louis of Bavaria was a man, not of really bad heart, but of a most fiery and ungovernable temper.

The first recorded occasion when Elizabeth's wit was employed to save her son, was soon after Conrad's death. Conradino had been ill with some childish sickness, and the Ghibellines under Manfred took the opportunity of sending ambassadors to inquire after his health and to take presents to him. What instinct of danger to her darling put it into Elizabeth's head one cannot say, but, instead of allowing Conradino to appear before the ambassadors, she dressed up one of his little companions to represent him and sent him to them in place of the King. The ambassadors showed great deference to the little boy whom they supposed to be the King, and before they parted from him they made him a present of some sweetmeats, which he, child-like, immediately ate, and soon after sickened and died. The ambassadors, satisfied that

their mission had been successful, and that the little King was dead, returned to Italy in great pretended grief and sorrow.

At Venice, whence they went by sea to Naples, they had black sails made for their vessels, and even the riggings of black also, and wearing black themselves they came to the presence of Manfred; but all this display of grief was soon followed by the election of Manfred to succeed his nephew, and at Monreale in the same year he was crowned King of Naples and Sicily.

Whether this story of the attempted poisoning of Conradino be true or not, the historical fact remains that Manfred seized the crown which belonged of right to his little nephew, and though, when he found the rumour of his death to be false, he declared that Conradino should be considered the heir, he does not seem to have made any attempt to restore it to him.

In spite, however, of all his faults and of the grave charges made against him by contemporary historians, Manfred is a very fascinating historical personage, and one well qualified to be a popular

hero. The poet Dante, speaking on the authority probably of those who had actually seen him, describes him as " blonde and handsome and of noble appearance," and while alluding to his dark deeds, considers that he repented and obtained divine forgiveness at the close of his life. Villani gives us a more detailed description, and speaks of him as, " beautiful in person, and a musician and singer, who loved to see around him minstrels and buffoons, and liberal, and courteous, and gracious so that he was greatly loved and in much favour."

He also tells us that Manfred always wore green.

CHAPTER X

THE STORIES OF A NOBLE LION AND OF THE GOLDEN FLORIN

It is quite a relief to turn to ten years of comparative peace in Florence. Outside her walls wars by which she increased her power and territory were certainly waged during this period, but inside the town itself strife and bloodshed ceased, and Guelphs and Ghibellines dwelt side by side in at anyrate outward harmony. The citizens were able for a time to return to their ordinary occupations, and family life was once more resumed. It was a democratic rule—that is to say, the government was really in the hands of the merchants and artisan classes, not in those of the wealthy or noble families; and one result of this was a return to a very simple mode of life.

Let us try for a moment to picture the men and women who moved through those narrow streets bounded by high-roofed houses, at this time. It

is not difficult to do so, for Villani, who was then living in Florence, gives us a very detailed account of their appearance. The men, he tells us, wore garments of coarse material, or in some cases simply the unlined skins of animals; they had caps on their heads, and leather sandals on their feet. The women, though dressed also very simply and inexpensively, must have added a picturesque note of colour to the scene; the poorer ones wore green linen dresses, and the ladies scarlet ones of a coarse woollen material, with unornamented leather girdles round their waists, plain sandals, and cloaks and hoods of miniver. They must have had much the appearance of a number of Father Christmases. The people also lived in a simple manner, taking plain food and dispensing with luxuries, and the girls were not married until they were about twenty, instead of almost in childhood as before.[1]

From this period of peace and prosperity, to be looked upon in after days by Florentines as veritably "the good old days," I will take two interesting stories related by the chronicler before

[1] See also Dante, Paradiso XV. 97-114.

we have once more to plunge into accounts of warfare and battle.

The first is more curious than of historical interest, and the second is connected with the history of the spread of Florentine commerce, and explains how Florence came to trade with North Africa.

In those early days, as at the present time, wild animals were prized and kept as public curiosities in large towns, and the Florentines had been presented with a very fine lion, which they kept in a cage in the square of S. John, where the Tower of Guardamorto had stood. One day, apparently through the carelessness of a keeper, the lion escaped and ran through the town, causing the terrified citizens to flee in every direction. On it went for some little distance without touching anyone, but near the Church of S. Michael it came suddenly to a standstill, and to the horror of all present seized hold of a little boy between its paws. The child was the only son of a widow, whose husband had been murdered, and when the poor woman discovered what had befallen

him she came shrieking to the spot with streaming hair and eyes of anguish, quite distracted with terror. In anxiety for her child, no thought of danger to herself seems to have occurred to her, and she came right up to the fierce beast, and to the amazement of all snatched the boy away from him. Naturally everyone thought that the lion would immediately spring after her and kill both her and the child, but instead he seems to have been too much surprised to do anything, and remained quite motionless, gazing before him with the strange steadfast gaze of a lion, while the mother and son escaped unhurt.

Villani has two reasons to suggest for this wonderful event, and I will give both, so that the reader may judge for himself which is the most likely to be true. The first is that this was a very noble lion, and that it was his nobility which caused him to spare the boy; the second is that Fate interposed to do so, because the boy had to fulfil his destiny and avenge his father's murder.

This, when grown up, he actually did, so at least there is that amount of evidence in favour of the

second theory, while in proof that the story really occurred, the child was known from henceforward as Orlanduccio of the Calfette Lion.

The second story is about the Golden Florin of Florence. Up to this time there had only been a silver coinage there, but now that the condition of the state was more prosperous, it was arranged by the merchants and the government that a gold coin should be struck. This was accordingly done, and the result was a handsome coin bearing the coat of arms of the town on one side, and an image of S. John the Baptist, the patron saint of it, on the other.

In course of time some of these golden coins circulated as far as the kingdom of Tunis in North Africa, and came before the notice there of the King, who was a wise and worthy man. He was much pleased with the appearance of the florins, and after having had them tested to prove that they were genuine gold, he sent for his interpreters to decipher the superscription, and they told him that on one side of the coin was the word Florence, and on the other S. John the Baptist. The King

had apparently never heard of Florence before, but he had enough knowledge to understand that the coins came from a Christian state, and he was very anxious to learn more. There were at that time a number of Pisan merchants settled in Tunis; for Pisa, being a port, had great advantages over inland Florence in the matter of foreign commerce, and traded with many distant parts of the world. For some of these the King now sent to inquire from them about this state which issued the golden coins, and when they were come before him, he put to them the question as to what manner of place this Florence was, and how it was looked upon by other Christian cities. The old feud, however, between Florence and Pisa had never healed, and there was always a great deal of jealousy between them, so the Pisan merchants, trusting to the King's ignorance, answered contemptuously:

"The Florentines are our inland Arabs."

This was as much as to say that the Florentines had no position at all, and were little better than a race of uncivilised rustics, but the King was too

wise a man to be taken in so easily, and was more than a match for the Pisans.

"It does not seem to me to be the money of Arabs," he said, looking at the florin; and then turning on the merchants he added:

"Oh, ye Pisans! what manner of gold coinage is yours?"

Then were the Pisans very much discomfited, for the fact was that they had never been able to afford a gold coinage of their own at all.

The King then inquired if there happened to be anyone from Florence present, and in reply a Florentine merchant named Pera Balducci arose, and was asked by the King to tell him the truth about his country. Balducci thereupon spoke out bravely and well, and told of the power and greatness of Florence, and of how the Pisans were smaller and weaker as a state, and had been beaten in battle by them, and were not wealthy enough to have a gold coinage at all.

The King was much pleased with this answer, and by reason of it and of the florin he gave to the Florentines the same trading privileges as to

the Pisans, and allowed them to be free of the city, and to have their own habitation there and to build themselves a church. And in proof that all this actually took place, Villani tells us that he had it direct from Balducci, who later on served with him as one of the Priors or chief magistrates of Florence.

CHAPTER XI

MONTEAPERTO, THE GREAT BATTLE

UNFORTUNATELY peace and prosperity was not to last long in Florence. Terrible misfortunes and reverses were soon to overtake her, and events to occur by which the whole course of her tempestuous history was once more to be changed.

During the years of popular government the proud Ghibelline nobles still continued to live within the walls, but they never really submitted to the rule of those whom they had always looked upon as so much their inferiors, and were merely awaiting their opportunity. For this purpose outside events were closely watched by them, and when, on the reported death of the little King Conradino, the Ghibelline prospects were reversed, and Manfred, as we have seen, proclaimed King of Naples and Sicily, they entered into secret negotiations with him. It is not known how far the King promised them his help, but the conspiracy against

the Florentine government was discovered at an early stage. Some of the Ghibelline leaders were at once beheaded, and others found shelter in the neighbouring town of Siena, which was friendly to their cause. This brought matters to a crisis, war between Florence and Siena was declared, and in the great Battle of Monteaperto Guelphs and Ghibellines staked everything in the open field.

The war was not confined to the two states mainly concerned. It spread to other towns, and the cause of the two rival parties throughout the whole of Northern Italy was involved. Each town had its powerful allies. The Sienese and the Florentine Ghibellines within their walls were aided by German and Italian troops sent by Manfred, while in response to the rallying call from Florence, the Guelphs of Genoa, Bologna, Prato, Pistoia and other towns hastened to her standard.

At first the Florentines had hesitated to make the advance across a hostile country to the open field, but Montalcino, a town under their immediate protection, was closely invested by the enemy, and

while they hesitated whether to attempt its relief, a trick played on them by the exiled Ghibellines succeeded in bringing them to a decision. The leader of the Ghibellines was a member of the Uberti family, named Farinata, a man of great courage, immense pride, and strong self-will, who it will be remembered, is described by Dante as holding even "Hell in scorn," as he raises himself from his fiery tomb on the sixth circle of hell to discourse with his fellow-countryman.[1] Farinata was now determined to lure the Florentines into the open, and he accordingly sent two friars to them with a false assurance that the exiles were weary of the war, and that they had only to advance to Siena for the gate of San Vito, by which they could easily obtain possession of the town, to be treacherously opened to them.

A great council was in consequence summoned to discuss the matter, but while some of the nobles opposed the advance into a hostile country, and urged caution and delay, their voices were powerless against the wishes of the people and the

[1] See Inferno X. 36.

government, who, flushed with ten years of victory and success, were mad for the expedition. One citizen named Cece, who ventured to oppose it with all the eloquence at his command, was at once reminded that the fine for speaking without permission of the elders was a hundred florins. He cried that he would pay the penalty and speak, and at this a fine of two hundred was imposed. He still spoke on, even offering to pay three hundred to be heard, and the magistrates seeing then that fines were useless against such determination, ordered him to be quiet under penalty of losing his head. This at last silenced the eager orator, and the discussion was closed with a decision in favour of an advance.

On an August day of the year 1260, the sound of the Toscin, or great bell, echoed through the streets of Florence, and almost every man capable of bearing arms rushed forward to obey its summons.

From each of the six quarters of the town they flocked with their banners, old men grown grey in past service, and animated still by the recollection

of Rustico Marignolli's death, boys fresh from their mothers, all eager to win their spurs in their country's cause. The nobles and wealthier citizens came prancing through the streets on their steeds, they were followed by heavily armed infantry, bearing bucklers and lances, and by the archers and crossbowmen. Banners waved and the glint of steel helmets in the August sun lighted up the streets, while above the continual tramp of horses and men there still rang out the deep note of the bell. The heart of every woman in Florence ached that day, for there was not one who had not a husband, a brother, or a son who hastened to obey it. And now another note was heard as the great Martinella or wooden tower was dragged out to be taken to the fight and the sound of its bell rang also in the air. Last of all, with great rumbling wheels, there appeared the Carroccio or sacred Car, which always accompanied an army, and with its crimson coverings and snow-white oxen added the last touch of picturesque effect to the scene. Mass was said over it ere it started, and round it was to centre the fiercest part of the

battle, for not even the standard itself was held in greater honour.

Near sunset of that August evening all was ready, and with the Carroccio and Martinella in their midst the whole army passed over the Arno, which gave back their reflection in its crimson and gold waters, while a great shout rose from those whose conditions of sex or age forced them to remain behind. With pomp and display and eager hopefulness that army wound out into the open country, leaving behind the city to which it was to return, how differently ere long!

The whole force encamped on the hill of Monteaperto, above the river Arbia, a few miles from Siena, and never dreaming that the enemy would attack them there, they waited impatiently for the gate of San Vito to be opened to them according to the false promises of the Ghibellines. Meanwhile, with the Guelph army were a certain number of Ghibellines, it being thought safer by the authorities to let those within Florence join the army than remain apart from it, and notably among those were the members of the Abati and Della Pressa

families, who had been forced to join against their inclination, and now soon found means of communication with the other Ghibellines inside the walls of Siena.

Siena meanwhile waited, quietly watching her opportunity, and during these days of inaction a curious religious ceremony took place by which the city was given the title of City of the Virgin. This was started by the Podestà, a certain Messer Buonaguida, who, possessed himself by a spirit of religious fervour, wrought the people up into a similar state of ecstasy. He appeared before them barefooted, and clad only in a shirt, and told them that it seemed to him right and fitting that he should make a gift of the city entrusted to his care to the Virgin. He then led the way to the cathedral with prayers and tears, holding the city keys in his hand, and followed by an excited crowd of citizens. There the Bishop was at the High Altar, apparently waiting to receive him, and Buonaguida flung himself at his feet imploring a blessing. This given he remained on his bare knees in a state of ecstasy, then rising he placed

the keys on the altar and addressed the Virgin with the words :

" Here are the keys which I and my fellow-citizens freely and simply give you."

Thus was Siena dedicated to the Virgin, and in the days that followed the feeling that the town was under her special protection gave courage and confidence to those who went out to fight.

Soon after the Ghibellines in the Florentine camp became acquainted for the first time with the supposed treachery by which Siena was to be given up to the Guelphs. Not knowing that it was all a trick, they sent a messenger named Razzante to warn their friends secretly, and at the same time to tell them how large and powerful an army the Florentines had mustered, and to advise them that they had better not risk a pitched battle against it. Farinata and the other of the Ghibellines who received Razzante soon explained to him that the supposed treachery was only a means which they had used to draw the Florentines near to the gates of Siena, but they were so determined not to be disappointed of their battle,

that in order to prevent the Sienese from becoming frightened by Razzante's account of the powerful army against them, they persuaded him to keep the true state of things dark, and to persuade the people that the Guelphs were a weak and badly organised force, and that there was every prospect of an easy victory for the Sienese. Razzante readily consented to follow their wishes, and in order to keep up the fiction, he was crowned with a garland and thus festively attired brought on horseback to the public Palace or Town Hall, where the citizens were assembled. There he declared before them all that the allied armies outside were badly commanded and disunited, and that if suddenly attacked they would be easily defeated.

Razzante's words had the desired effect, and acted at once like a spark to tinder. A cry of " To battle, to battle ! " immediately arose, and the whole assembly flew to arms. If after this there were any waverers the last trace of cowardice was put to flight by a stirring address from one of the leaders, while those already eager to fight were still further stimulated by it.

They were reminded that not only their lives and their liberty but their honour depended on their conduct in the field; they were told that it was to protect their wives, their daughters, their children from the horrors of war in their midst that they were called upon to fight, and finally they were encouraged by promises of an undoubted victory if they would stand firm and face the enemy with valour. Not the Florentines themselves, when a few weeks before they had flocked round their sacred car, were more eager for battle than were now the Sienese. The whole town was given up to thoughts of war. Every man was armed, and the old men and young boys who were unfit for service in the open field were employed to guard the ramparts. Then, amidst the glint of spears and clank of arms, another sight and sound mingled. The women took their part in the preparations and, robed in white, they moved softly through the streets in procession to the churches, filling the air with trembling songs of invocation to the Virgin.

The gate of San Vito was opened at last, but not

to let in the enemy; instead there issued through it this large and well-trained army. The Florentines, in their camp on the Arbia, knowing nothing of what had taken place, and resting in fancied security, took the first glimmering of spears to be only a small band of skirmishers as they saw them emerge on the plain below. But the glimmering increased, and column after column marched up, until they saw a whole army drawn up in order of battle before them. Rapidly then they flew to arms, and took up their position about half way down the hill, with their right wing resting on the Castle of Monteaperto. And now for a brief space there was a dead silence as the two armies faced each other, each waiting for the other to begin. The first move came from the Ghibellines, and as their right wing advanced towards the force on the height above them a low murmur passed from man to man, and soon the hills around echoed to shouts from a thousand throats. But in front stood the ranks of the Guelphs, like an iron wall, ready to receive them. There was an answering shout, with which mingled the rush of feet and the

clang of armour, and the Ghibellines were pressed back, with the hill as yet unconquered. They rallied in the plains, to which the Guelphs pursued them, leaving at the same time their right wing to move towards the Castle of Monteaperto, and to outflank the enemy there. But at this moment, when the advantage was with the Florentine allies, an event in their midst changed the fortunes of the day. In the centre of their army stood one of the Pazzi family holding the standard of Florence and surrounded by three thousand brave knights, who with lances couched were making ready for a charge into the Ghibelline ranks. At one moment that banner waved proudly aloft, a signal and an encouragement to all the host; the next, to the general dismay and consternation, it was seen, for some unaccountable cause, to waver and fall. A stroke from the treacherous sword of Bocca of the Abati family had done the deed, by severing the arm of the standard-bearer, and the next moment he and the other Ghibelline traitors were seen to gallop over to the enemy.

The moral effect of this unexpected event was

disastrous. The nerve of the Guelph army was shaken, no man felt sure any longer of his neighbour, and the spirit of suspicion, one of the worst to enter a battlefield, gained rapid ground. The Sienese seized this favourable moment for a vigorous charge, before which the disheartened Florentines were borne back; but the old spirit of Guelph heroism was not yet quenched, and as they were about to fly their courage was again rallied by the valiant conduct of a body of gentlemen, who with spears and swords attacked the enemy in a hand-to-hand encounter. It was now doubtful whether even yet the day might not be saved to the Florentines, but a sudden charge of the enemy carried confusion and dismay with it. The cavalry fled, and though the infantry still held their ground it was in a broken and half-hearted way. One last desperate attempt at resistance was, however, yet to take place.

Through all the fierceness of the fray the sacred car had as yet been untouched, and still stood in the midst of the Florentine army, the gentle oxen unmoved by the terrible tumult around them,

and the standard still waving over their heads. While that remained all was not yet lost. Thither gathered a body of the bravest Florentines, led by the veteran warrior old Tornaquinci, determined to protect the national honour at any cost, and round it took place the last great struggle of the day. Now arrows flew and blood flowed freely, the battle-axe was waved in air with deadly effect, and knives and daggers and staves bore their part in the work of slaughter. Knight after knight fell, and yet the remnant fought until fighting was of no more avail, and the enemy were upon the car. Amidst the carnage old Tornaquinci never flinched, and now that the work was done he resolved at least to die. His son and three other young kinsmen stood near him, and, addressing them, he pointed out that death was preferable to surrender, and reminded them how of old men had envied the heroic end of Rustico.

"Shall we not too," he cried, "make men envy our fate by dying in harness on the Arbia!"

Then with the words, "As I was born before you, so will I now, as I ought, go before you to a

most honourable death," he spurred his horse into the midst of the enemy's ranks, and, followed by his four companions, died as a hero, fighting bravely to the last.

The battle was decided now; but as the Martinella and even the Carroccio itself were borne away in triumph by the Ghibellines, the already defeated Guelphs still continued to fight, until at last they were obliged to give way before the enemy's attack, and wild confusion, slaughter, and flight raged uninterruptedly across the plain.

The Guelphs left two thousand two hundred dead on that fatal field, while no less than fifteen thousand captives from among the survivors are stated to have been led in triumph through the streets of Siena. The next day a few miserable fugitives, with downcast faces of grief and shame, crept into the gates of Florence, which they had left so proudly but a short time before.

The whole town was given over to grief and desolation at the tidings they bore, and the air was filled with the wailing of women as, in reply to the frantic inquiries for missing loved ones, a

downward glance at blood-stained garments was the only reply.

But the spirit which had fought so bravely, and which was to lead Florence through many another stormy day, was not yet quenched in the warriors' breasts, as they bade the sorrowing women not to weep for those who had given their lives gloriously in their country's cause, but for themselves, who had lived to come back with the story of her shame and dishonour.

CHAPTER XII

GUELPH VICTORIES AND THE GIANT CACA

A FEW days after the Battle of Monteaperto a miserable procession of weeping men, women, and children left the gates of Florence, and sought refuge at the Guelph town of Lucca. Three days later the victorious Ghibellines entered a practically deserted town. They were accompanied by eight hundred German horsemen under a Count Giordano, who represented King Manfred, and they soon appointed as Podestà Count Guido Novello, whose character is perhaps best described by the fact that his first care was to have a road made from his palace which would render escape out of the town easy in case of danger! The Ghibellines were not to be congratulated on their first choice of a Podestà.

A general meeting of the Ghibellines in Tuscany was held a little later on at the town of Empoli, about twenty miles from Florence, and is memor-

able for the infamous proposal that Florence should be entirely demolished and for the one courageous opposition to this. Had it not been for Farinata of the Uberti the proposal would actually have been carried out, and Florence, with her palaces and churches, and the works of art, which even then were beginning to adorn them, would have been completely wiped off the face of the earth. Fortunately, this one man dared oppose the unanimous decision of the others, and did so with such fiery and scornful indignation that they all yielded before it.

"Better it would have been," he declared, "to have died in battle on the banks of the Arbia than to have survived to hear such a proposal." And he nobly declared that he would rather defend his birthplace single-handed to the last gasp than let it submit to such a fate.[1]

Thus Florence was spared, and the Ghibellines continued to rule there, while the Guelph exiles, nobles and citizens alike, were spending a miserable time of poverty and distress outside. In their

[1] See Dante, Inferno X. 91-93.

present state of hopelessness, when no ray of light was seen to penetrate the dark clouds of their future, the heads of the unfortunate party resolved in desperation to apply to Conradino to take up their cause and be their leader against his uncle, Manfred. The poor little King was still quite a child, and his mother, who had before protected him against the wicked designs of the Ghibellines, was now called upon to save him from the friendly advances of the Guelphs. She received the ambassadors courteously, but was quite firm in her decision that nothing would induce her to part with her son, nor allow him to take his part in public events while still so young. They seem, however, to have gained access to Conradino himself as well, and to have been listened to with favour by him, for when they left they took with them his little mantle lined with miniver, as a pledge that he himself would come when old enough. The simple token was received with great rejoicings by the Guelphs, who placed it in a church in Lucca, where it became almost an object of worship among them. But the hopes it

awakened were never realised, for when at last the boy King entered the arena the shifting scenes had changed, and it was not as the Guelph champion that he did so. Well might Elizabeth's loving heart try to keep him as long as possible from embarking on the stormy seas of Italian politics, but the fate she endeavoured so bravely to avert from him overtook him as it was ere manhood.

The unfortunate Guelphs were not allowed a quiet resting-place for long. They had only been three years in Lucca when the Ghibellines obtained possession of it, and they with their wives and families were driven forth homeless once more. Across the steep mountain passes which led to Bologna they made their way with much toil and difficulty, and in Bologna itself found shelter for some time, but suffered much from want. In those days, however, soldiers were not long without employment, and when soon after war broke out between the Guelphs and Ghibellines at Modena, the former sent to Bologna for help from the Florentine exiles. One can imagine with what eagerness

they started to meet their foe again and to have a chance of earning something for the support of those dependent on them, and with what joy, after defeating the Ghibellines, they returned to their families with much spoil, including greatly needed horses and arms. This was the beginning of brighter days, and was soon followed by even a better piece of fortune. A similar disturbance between Guelphs and Ghibellines occurred at the town of Reggio, and the Guelphs there being hard pressed, and having heard how well the Florentine exiles had fought at Modena, also sent for them. Among the Ghibellines there was one named Caca, whom, on account of his great strength and size, none of the enemy dared approach. He was almost a giant in stature, and he had an iron club, which he used with such deadly effect that he slew or seriously injured all who came near him. When the Florentines appeared on the scene a fight was taking place in the great central square, which Reggio had in common with other Italian towns, and there Caca stood amidst the Ghibellines wielding his great club, and sustaining the brunt

of the battle in his own person. The Florentines noticed this, and saw that the way to defeat the Ghibellines was to unarm Caca, and that their best mode of attack would be to aim at him. They, therefore, carefully chose twelve of their very bravest knights, whom they called the "paladins," and they sent them, armed with daggers, to attack Caca. It took the whole twelve to strike down and slay this powerful man, but at length, after great resistance and a brave defence on his part, they succeeded in their mission, and Caca fell. The Ghibellines lost heart when they saw their champion thus laid low, and took to flight, and so were easily driven out of Reggio. Thus again the Florentines had won the day for their side, and this time the spoil was even greater than from Modena.

CHAPTER XIII

A NEW CHAMPION AND THE STORY OF THE MYSTERIOUS STEWARD

We have now come to the point when a new actor is to step on the stage and take the leading part in the drama of Italian civil warfare. The Pope, Urban IV., began about this time to cast his eyes over Europe in search of a champion for the Guelph party, which so sorely needed a head, and his choice fell upon Charles of Anjou, a brother of the saintly king, Louis IX. of France, whom he invited into Italy to claim the throne unlawfully held by Manfred.

Charles accepted the offer of the Pope, and by this the whole course of Italian history was again changed.

Here let us pause to make a brief acquaintance with this prince, who is destined to play so important a part in the story.

Let us imagine a tall, fierce-looking man, with

an olive complexion and a long nose, who seldom smiled, "spoke little and acted much"; was faithful to his promises, wise and prudent in council, firm in adversity, active and resolute, slept little, thinking much sleep a waste of time; was liberal to his knights and most valiant in battle, but who at the same time was entirely without the humane virtues of charity and forgiveness; was harsh, relentless, devoid of all instinct of pity or mercy—in a word, a brave man, but one as cruel as brave. Such a man was Charles of Anjou, a typical product of his times, but devoid of those lighter and more attractive qualities which the growing forces of civilisation developed in some of his contemporaries.

No greater contrast could well be imagined to the pleasure-loving and fascinating monarch whom he was called upon to oppose. The love songs of minstrels, the jests of jugglers and buffoons, the society of ladies, in all of which the fair-haired Manfred took such keen delight, were entirely without attraction to his dark-visaged enemy. One pursuit and one only interested Charles, the acquiring of

territory by which he could add to his wealth and power. His ruling passion was ambition, and in the fulfilment of that no obstacle was allowed to stand in his way. Urban had chosen a champion well fitted for the task which lay before him.

Charles was forty-six years of age at the time when he accepted the Pope's offer, and had been married for some years to a woman who not only sympathised with all his ambitious designs, but was herself of a most ambitious nature. Her name was Beatrice, and she was the daughter of Count Raymond of Provence, about whom and the marriage of his daughters our old friend Villani gives us a story which reads like a bit out of a fairy tale.

This Count Raymond, as he tells us, was a wise and courteous lord, and an encourager of the arts. He gathered worthy and learned men around him, and the fame of his goodness was widespread. Attracted by it, there came to the Court one day a poor pilgrim. He was quite alone, with a mule bearing his bundle, and a pilgrim's staff and scrip in his hand. None knew whence he came, and

even the name of Romeo, which afterwards clung to him, meant simply a wanderer, and only came into use as a proper name later. The Count, however, took a great fancy to him, and gave him welcome to the Court, and in course of time he found him so wise, and his counsels so helpful, that he appointed him his own head steward, and asked him to remain. This Romeo agreed to do, and he devoted himself to his duties with such skill and ability that before long he had trebled the revenues. Soon after, when war broke out between Provence and the neighbouring state of Toulouse, it was owing to this improved state of things that Provence, though much the smaller country, had the victory, and Count Raymond learnt more and more to trust to his faithful steward in consequence.

Raymond had no son to succeed him, but he had four daughters, and now that they were of marriageable age he left the important question of their marriage also to Romeo, and again he succeeded beyond the highest expectations. It was owing to him that from that small and comparatively unimportant Court there came three queens

and a titular empress. The first marriage arranged was that of the eldest daughter, Margaret, with no less a person than Louis IX., King of France, and after this it was less difficult to make brilliant marriages for the other sisters. The King of England, Henry III., sought the next one, Eleanor, and this led also to the marriage of the third, Sanzia, to Henry's brother, Richard, Duke of Cornwall, who had been elected Emperor, though never actually crowned in Rome.

There now only remained the youngest daughter, Beatrice, to provide for, and when the choice of a husband was to be made for her the supply of kings had perhaps run short. At anyrate Romeo's advice was that she should marry a brave man, who could follow Raymond as his heir, and the choice fell on Charles of Anjou.

The end of Romeo's story, as told by Villani, is too pathetic and picturesque to omit, although it has no bearing on Florentine history.

After he had ruled the state so wisely and well for Count Raymond, and had thus increased his revenue, and improved his position in every

way, troubles fell upon Romeo. The barons of the country began to grow jealous of his power and favour, and accused him of mismanaging the treasury, and Romeo was called upon by the Count to give an account of his stewardship.

Naturally he was deeply hurt at this apparent want of trust and at this ungrateful return for all his services. He refused, therefore, to argue the matter or to clear himself, and replied to the accusations with these simple and dignified words :

" Count, I have served thee for long, and raised thy state from a small one to a large, and for this, through the false counsels of thy people, thou art little grateful. I came to thy Court as a poor pilgrim, and I have dealt honestly by thee. Now let me have my mule and my staff and my scrip, as I had when I came, and renounce thy service."

Much dismayed at this, the Count bitterly regretted what he had done, and tried his utmost to persuade the good steward to stay, but in vain. Once more as a poor pilgrim, with nothing but his mule and his bundle, Romeo turned his back on

the Count, and was seen there no more. But in after days the mysterious stranger was spoken of with bated breath, "and many," so Villani tells us, "held that he was a holy soul."

Beatrice, the wife of Charles, was, as has been said, of a very ambitious nature; it had always been a very sore point with her that, while her sisters each had a crown, she had none, and she bitterly resented having to take a lower position than theirs.

She even made it a subject of complaint to her husband, and on one occasion when she was doing so Charles promised her that she should also be a queen in time. When, therefore, the chance was given to him of seizing a throne to which he had no shadow of right, Charles was urged to accept it no less by his wife's ambition than by his own.

Early in 1265 he set out from Marseilles by sea with a portion of his army to enter his new kingdom. The remainder was to follow overland, and was accompanied by Beatrice, and led by Guy of Montfort, the fourth son of the Earl of Leicester, who headed the English Barons in their revolt

against Henry III., and was slain at the Battle of Evesham. Guy had fled to the French Court immediately after that event; but vengeance for his father's death was not put aside from his thoughts, and an opportunity for fulfilling it eventually occurred in Italy, as we shall see at a later point.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST OF KING MANFRED

CHARLES reached Rome in May 1265 after a voyage of many perils and adventures. On the news of his approach reaching Manfred a fleet was sent to intercept him; but before any encounter took place a terrible storm broke on the Ghibelline vessels, and drove them back to shore. Charles was saved from an encounter by this; but he suffered much from the violence of the storm, and at last arrived at Pisa in a very spent condition, and with only three of the thirty armed galleys with which he had started. From Pisa he set sail again for Rome, and was borne by a strong wind to the mouth of the Tiber, where he embarked in a small vessel, and pushed on alone to a convent outside the walls. The remainder of the fleet, however, arrived soon after, the whole army disembarked, and, placing himself at its head, Charles made a triumphant entry into Rome. He

had to wait, however, until December for the arrival of the army which had started by land under Guy of Montfort, but in that month they also arrived. Beatrice then had her wish, and she and Charles were crowned in Rome as King and Queen of Naples and Sicily. The ceremony over, the new-crowned King started at once on a campaign through his kingdom, and soon overcame the mountain passes by which Manfred sought to protect it against him. He entered the kingdom of Naples, and near the town of Benevento, on the banks of the River Calore, the two rival Kings, with their armies, came face to face. Had Manfred been as prudent as he was brave he would not at this stage have risked everything in a pitched battle; but the sight of his enemy's army within reach was more than he could resist, and with characteristic impetuosity he crossed the river, and, encamping on the plain of Grandella, prepared to fight. The opposing force was no less eager for an encounter.

"This," Charles was heard to say as the enemy advanced to meet him across the open

country, "is the day for which we have longed."

The trumpets were immediately sounded, and the men flew to arms.

On the French side the cavalry was divided into three divisions. The first consisted of one thousand French, led by Philip of Montfort; the second of about nine hundred Provincial nobles and Roman allies, led by Charles himself, supported by Guy of Montfort; and the third of seven hundred Flemings and others, led by Robert, Count of Flanders, a brother-in-law of the King's. With these were also a fourth band, consisting of about four hundred of the Florentine exiles, whose hope of returning to their own country depended largely on the result of this battle against Manfred and the Ghibellines.

The Florentine Ghibellines were, however, unrepresented on the other side, and when Manfred, in reply to his inquiries, was told that the little band of men in the opposing force were Guelphs, he was heard to ask bitterly:

"Where are the Florentine Ghibellines, whom

I have served so well and for whom I have spent so much ? "

Manfred's Saracen infantry made the first attack. With a deafening shout and a blinding storm of arrows they flung themselves on the French, but only to be repulsed. On this the cavalry sped up to cover their retreat, shouting the battle cry of " Ho ! Knights of Suabia ! " to which there came from the French ranks the answering shout : " Ho ! Knights, Monjoie ! "

The battle had now begun in deadly earnest ; but amid all the din and tumult the Papal legate passed through the French ranks on horseback, urging them on by promises of absolution to all who fought for Holy Church, and pronouncing benedictions over the army even at the height of the conflict.

And now it soon became apparent which way the battle would go.

In the midst of the melée a cry arose from someone among the French of " To your daggers, to your daggers ! *Strike at the horses !* " And this suggestion, though contrary to all knightly rules, was

acted upon, causing much confusion to the German cavalry. But a worse cause than unknightly conduct among the enemy's troops worked against King Manfred—treachery among his own. Wherever the fight was fiercest there was seen the tall figure of Charles leading on to victory, and always followed by a crowd of eager knights. But when Manfred urged his troops to follow him as he plunged into the midst of danger he found himself deserted, and saw a body of his most powerful supporters, followed by their men, flee from the field. The day was now practically lost to the Ghibelline cause; but a few of Manfred's followers still remained faithful, and with them he resolved to face the battle to the end, and rather to die as a soldier and king than live to bear shame and defeat. At the moment of this last rally the Imperial Eagle, which he wore as a crest on his helmet, fell on to the saddle-bow, and the unfortunate King saw in this slight incident a supernatural warning of disaster.

"It is a sign from God," he said, turning to those near. "With my own hand I fastened this

crest in such a manner that it was not possible for it to fall. *It is not by chance that it has done so.*"

In spite of the disheartening effect of this incident on all, Manfred pressed forward into the thickest part of the fray, where, deprived thus of all mark of his royal rank, he was quite unrecognised. Here one more bitter experience awaited him, and as he turned to those on whose fidelity he had thought he could rely to the last, it was to find that they too showed signs of desertion, and a few minutes more saw them follow their companions from the field, leaving their King to face his perilous position alone. He did not remain there long. An arrow from a French soldier, ignorant of his victim's identity, pierced his heart, and the forsaken leader fell to rise no more.

Thus died Manfred, warrior and poet, representative in his person of the most striking virtues and vices of his age. He was denounced by the Church, deserted by those who at one time served him devoutly, and accused by historians of crimes abhorrent to even the morality of that day. Yet

in spite of all he stands out against the dark background of mediæval history as a fascinating figure surrounded by a halo of charm and romance, and if his life were stained with many sins at least his death was that of a hero. Well might Dante express the hope that in that last dark hour, when, deserted, defeated, and betrayed, his life blood stained the plains of Grandella, he made his peace with God, and received that wide-embracing pardon which sees above and beyond what the paltry records of man can relate.[1]

In the conduct of the victorious Charles after this Battle of Grandella (or of Benevento as it is sometimes called) we have the first proof of that hard, vindictive side of his character which marks the future course of his reign, for the captured fugitives from Manfred's army were not only sent to Provence as prisoners, but were there by his orders put to a cruel end, while his feelings of vengeance against the King himself followed him even after death.

For three days the body of Manfred was not

[1] See Dante, Purgatorio III.

discovered, the absence of the royal crest making recognition difficult, but at last one of his camp-followers recognised it, and, throwing it across the back of an ass, he drove it before him, crying: "Who buys Manfred? Who buys Manfred?"

One of Charles's barons, horrified at this desecration of a royal corpse, took the trouble to administer a beating to the low fellow, from whom he bought the body, and conveyed it to Charles.

A pathetic scene took place in connection with this, for Charles not being familiar with his enemy's appearance, and naturally anxious to be quite certain whether he were really killed, sent for Manfred's own barons to identify the corpse.

They were each brought up to it, and asked if it were really Manfred who lay dead before them, and one after the other, in timid tones, they answered "Yes." But when it came to the turn of one named Giordano Lancia, and the cloth which covered the dead face was withdrawn, revealing the King's features, his grief overcame all thoughts of caution.

"Oh! my master, my master!" he cried, beating

his breast and shedding torrents of tears. "Alas! to what a pass are we come!"

No better proof could have been given to Charles that it was in truth Manfred's body which lay there, and in that light alone this pathetic scene seems to have struck him. Even his own knights, however, were touched, and they entreated him to give his enemy honourable burial.

"I would do so willingly if he were not excommunicated," was the King's reply as he turned coldly away, and thus found an excuse to follow his own hard-hearted inclination.

In unhallowed ground at the foot of the Bridge of Benevento, with no funeral rites and no marks of respect, the body of this son of an emperor was laid, to be torn up later, it is said, from even this unhonoured resting-place, and with inverted torches and other signs of excommunication placed on the banks of the Verde, so that even in death the enemy of the Pope should not remain in Papal territory.

CHAPTER XV

A COWARDLY LEADER

We must now trace the effect of these great and stirring events on the history of Florence. We left the Republic in the hands of the Ghibelline nobles, with Count Guido Novello as Podestà; but although all the leading Guelph families had left after the defeat of Monteaperto a number of citizens whose sympathies were with the Guelphs had remained behind, and they now did not disguise their joy when news of the defeat and death of Manfred reached them. This alarmed Count Guido, who was a man easily frightened; and as he was very anxious to be friendly with both Guelph and Ghibelline parties he hit on what he thought was a brilliant plan for pleasing them both, and, as is often the way with such an attempt, succeeded in pleasing neither.

About this time a gentleman of Bologna started a new order of religious knighthood, known in

derision as that of the Joyous Friars, because, though its members resembled friars in some respects, they were not obliged to take any vows of poverty or continence, and were even free to mix in the world and take part in its pleasures.[1]

It now occurred to Guido, as a good way of keeping the peace in Florence and averting the storm, the low rumble of which was already to be heard, that he would invite two of the Joyous Friars, one a Guelph and one a Ghibelline, to rule jointly as Podestà in his place. He further, however, sought to conciliate the people by instituting a council, formed of thirty-six citizens belonging to the trade guilds of the town, to take an active part in the government.

These guilds were hereafter called the Greater and Lesser Arts. There were seven of the former—namely, Judges and Notaries, Merchants of French cloth, Money-changers, Wool Merchants, Physicians and Apothecaries, Silk Merchants, and Farriers. The Lesser or Inferior Arts were only five: they were Drapers, Butchers, Shoemakers,

[1] See Dante Inferno XXIII. 103.

Workers in Stone and Wood, Smiths and Iron-workers.

Guido's hopeful anticipation that this new government would lead to peace was soon destroyed. The Ghibelline nobles now grew dissatisfied, and determined not to submit to a government, in which the despised people had such a large share. So one day, while the thirty-six councillors were assembled at a meeting, a taunting voice from outside was heard to say: "Where are these thieving thirty-six? Let them appear, that we may cut them all to pieces."

Up sprang the councillors at this, forgetting all about their meeting, and, eager to be revenged on the utterer of the taunt, they rushed in a body to the door. An armed force of Ghibelline nobles awaited them there, and at once the whole place was in an uproar. The news spread with lightning-like rapidity, and from every quarter of the town members of the various arts came flocking with their banners. Soon a fairly large number had gathered in a wide street called the Piazza Santa Trinità, and it was the work of a very short time

to erect a substantial barricade there against the Ghibellines, who, led now by Count Guido, approached from the other side. An attempt to force the barricade was made, and some few of the German cavalry who were with Count Guido actually passed it, but no one else seemed to have the spirit to follow; and as the Ghibellines were now not only receiving a shower of arrows in front, but stones and other missiles were being hurled at them from the towers and houses, Count Guido considered the position much too dangerous for him, and with reversed banners they all hastened to the Palace of the Podestà. Here a ridiculous scene took place. The two Podestàs, with their heads out of an upper window, shouted to Count Guido to go back quickly to his house, and undertook, if he would do so, to quiet the people. In reply Guido begged and entreated them to give him the keys of the city, so that he might at once leave such a dangerous spot, and seek safety outside. In vain the excited Podestàs, with shouts and gesticulations, tried to persuade him that such a course was entirely unnecessary and would also

have a very bad effect. Guido had seen the angry faces of the mob and the arrows and stones flying, and nothing would induce him to stay. At last the Podestàs, finding argument useless, handed over the keys to him. Then Guido ordered a complete silence, and, with a poor attempt at dignity, began to call over his troops; but he first took care to have his own precious person protected by three members of the thirty-six, two of whom were placed one on either side of him and one immediately behind, and as he knew the people would not wish to hurt their own representatives he then managed to summon sufficient courage for his task. Finding that all his troops were there, both the Florentine Ghibellines, and the Germans sent long before by Manfred, as well as the allies from Pisa and other Italian cities, which he had called to his aid when danger threatened, he called upon his standard-bearer to lead the way, and they all started to leave Florence, a craven army fleeing from a small body of excited citizens. They crept along by back ways in cowardly fashion, avoiding the Guelph houses as far as

possible for fear of what might greet them from the windows; and it is not easy to feel much sympathy with them when it is told that, in spite of all this precaution, as they came to a part called the Borgo di Pinti, they received a shower of stones.

In the evening of the same day Guido with his troops reached the neighbouring town of Prato, and no sooner were they in safety there than his feeling of panic subsided, and, like the weak and foolish man that he was, he began not only to see how stupidly he had acted, but to think that he could at once retrieve his error by following the opposite course to the one first adopted. Accordingly the very next morning he called out his troops again, and marched them all back by the road that he had brought them the day before, with the intention of taking up his deserted post in Florence. But as Villani sagely remarks in speaking of these events: "After a thing ill judged and worse carried out repentance is in vain," and Guido soon discovered that it was not so easy to enter Florence as to leave it. For

when he arrived at the gates he found them closely barred against him, and after first trying the effect of threats, and then of persuasion, only to receive a shower of those stones and arrows which he so much dreaded, in reply, he gave up the attempt to enter, and started once more slowly and sullenly for Prato. On the way there he made an attack on the Castle of Capalle, not that it would have been of any particular use to him if taken, but simply from baffled rage and a wish to fight someone. He did not, however, even succeed here, so he and the army re-entered Prato with nothing accomplished, to brood over their folly in vain. Guido does not seem, however, to have learnt much to help him on a future occasion from this lesson, for wherever we meet with him again it is generally in much the same position, an ignoble figure of cowardice with his back turned to the enemy. Through this flight of Count Guido, Florence was once more free of the Ghibellines, and the government was again in the hands of the people, whose first step was to dismiss the two friars from their post of Podestà, for the

hypocrisy and dishonest practices, which they tried to conceal by their religious name, were seen through and disapproved by the burly citizens. Their next step was to send for a Podestà and military aid from the friendly town of Orvieto, and early the next year, the new government being established, both Guelphs and Ghibellines were recalled. An attempt to reconcile these two parties by inter-marriages was made, but the animosity between them was much too deep-seated to be so easily healed, and the peace thus secured was of a very temporary and superficial kind.

So soon after as 1267 we find the Guelphs sending secretly to Charles for soldiers and a leader, and when in response Guy of Montfort with eight hundred men appeared on the scene the Ghibellines thought discretion the better part of valour, and quietly withdrew outside the walls. Florence was therefore once more in Guelph hands; but Charles was appointed Imperial Vicar, and sent a representative of his own to rule over the city each year, so the government was also partly under royal jurisdiction.

The old strife was soon renewed, and from outside the city the Ghibellines kept up a desultory warfare, but everywhere the cause of the Guelphs and of King Charles gained ground.

It was now the turn of the Ghibellines sorely to need a leader, and their eyes sought the lawful heir to the Sicilian crown, the little Conradino, who was still far away from the strife, guarded in his German home by his mother Elizabeth.

CHAPTER XVI

A YOUTHFUL HERO

CONRADINO was even now only in his sixteenth year, and his mother Elizabeth endeavoured rather to train him to be a good and great man than to trouble about the extent of his dominions. We have seen how she guarded him from the plots of the Ghibellines and of his uncle, Manfred, and allowed his Italian dominions to be taken from him for a time rather than plunge the youthful monarch into the horrors of war, and how later she refused the overtures of the Florentine Guelphs on account of his tender years. Matters had, however, changed rapidly since then; the kingdom which Conradino inherited was no longer in the hands of an uncle, who, nominally at anyrate, was guarding it for the lawful heir. Manfred had been slain, and the crown seized by one who had no shadow of right to it beyond Papal authority and the force of arms. Conradino himself, though

still only a boy, was old enough, under special circumstances, to fill the part of a man, and all these points had to be taken into consideration when the Ghibelline ambassadors arrived at the distant Court and claimed the leadership of the King. The boy himself inherited the finer qualities of his race, and was eager to take up the heavy responsibilities of his position.

In her heart Elizabeth must have known from the first what the answer to the ambassadors would be; yet, woman-like, she pleaded for delay, urging his youth, and pointing out that he was much too young to hold the reins of government, and, above all, to enter a hostile country and to take up arms against so strong and experienced a foe as Charles. Such arguments had little weight with the eager Ghibellines, and in reply they drew an encouraging picture of the state of the country. They declared that the rule of Charles and of the French was really hated by the people, and described atrocities and outrages committed by them, especially dwelling on their sacrilege of churches and monasteries, thinking

thus, no doubt, to appeal to Elizabeth on the religious side, which was so strong a part of her nature. In conclusion, they assured her that the arrival on the scene of the lawful heir was all that was needed to cause the country to flock to his standard, that the people were eager to revolt and only waited for a sign, and that Manfred and even Conrad were still deeply mourned. The boy, himself brave, ardent, and impetuous, something too of a poet by temperament and with a poet's ideal hopes and dreams, was seized with a burning desire to avenge his uncle's death and his grandfather's misfortunes, and when, added to this, the Ghibellines gave him glowing pictures of the reward which awaited him, not even a mother's love could keep him from his destiny.

With an aching heart Elizabeth watched him prepare. Had not a secret foreboding warned her from his cradle that for this child, born in the midst of such stormy times, a tragic fate awaited?

Fired by their leader's enthusiasm, and knowing little of the real nature of the task before them, the young German nobles flocked to Conradino's

standard—among them none more eager than his best-loved friend, Frederick of Austria, deprived also on his part of his heritage, which had been seized by Ottocar of Bohemia.

In the summer of 1267 all was ready, and Elizabeth saw the son, on whom so many hopes rested, depart for the first time from her gaze. Those tender eyes which had watched over him so carefully would never more rest on that well-loved form, but probably even her anxious heart could not imagine the full tragedy of the fate which awaited him, nor gauge to what extent the hard-heartedness of Charles could go.

With an army of ten thousand Conradino crossed the Alps, and during the autumn of 1267 reached Verona, where he was warmly welcomed, and where friendly messages were received by him from many of the neighbouring towns. This favourable beginning to the enterprise was followed, however, by a severe blow to the young King. His uncle, Louis of Bavaria, had encouraged him to start, and sent a large number of troops with him, but had made no provision for their keep. No

sooner had they seen him safely so far on his way than these followers grew discontented, and soon after Conradino saw them turn their backs on him, and found himself in a strange country, deserted by those on whom he had most relied for support. Among these was his stepfather, the Count of Tirol, and the boy-King was thus left without responsible guide or adviser and with an army reduced to three thousand. Nothing daunted, however, by these misfortunes, and encouraged by the friendliness shown him in Northern Italy, he made his way to the coast of Genoa with his infantry, and there, being provided by the Genoese with a fleet of twenty-five vessels, he set sail for Pisa, where he landed in May 1268, and was received with every mark of honour and enthusiasm. Here he was joined a little later by his cavalry, which he had left at Verona to follow him by land.

Meanwhile news of his arrival in Italy had spread, and signs of rebellion and revolt from the rule of Charles began to appear, and everywhere the Ghibellines were preparing to take up arms in the cause of Conradino. Now too a powerful

ally sprang up in the person of Prince Henry of Spain, an exiled brother of the King of that country, who having quarrelled with Charles was glad to throw himself on the side of his enemy, and proceeded to stir up Sicily in favour of the young King, with such effect that soon the whole island was in a blaze, and the spirit of revolt rapidly spread from there to the mainland. Charles began to take alarm, and, leaving Tuscany, where he was at the time, he hurried back to defend his kingdom. Between Florence and Arezzo part of the German army came into contact with the Guelphs, who, caught in an ambuscade, were completely defeated, and, flushed with this his first victory, Conradino pressed eagerly forward. At the outskirts of Papal territory he was met, not by an army, but by a command from the Pope, Clement IV., to disband his troops and stop his advance under pain of excommunication.

Conradino took no notice, and when in consequence the Church hurled her strongest weapon at him, and an interdict was pronounced against him and his whole army, the boy-King showed his

defiance by continuing his southward course and passing under the very walls of Viterbo, where the Pope and his cardinals were at the time assembled.

The Pope was engaged in prayers when Conradino arrived at his gates; but the priests, frightened at the sight of this large armed force, did not hesitate to interrupt him.

"Do not fear," was Clement's calm reply to their agitated words; "all this display should disappear in smoke."

Then as he stood on the ramparts and watched the two youthful generals, Conradino and Frederick of Austria, reviewing their cavalry on the plain below, some kindly feeling for the pathos of their position seemed to sweep over the pontiff.

"They are victims," he said, turning to those near him, "letting themselves be led to the sacrifice."

Fatal words, which would, no doubt, have been derided by the youths themselves, but destined, nevertheless, to be fulfilled in all their tragic intensity ere long.

Still flushed with success, and confident of victory,

Conradino now advanced to Rome, where Henry of Spain awaited him with an armed force of Spanish, German, and Italian Ghibellines, and here his reception was of a kind even further to raise his hopes. The whole city was gaily adorned with costly tapestries and garlands of flowers and laurel in his honour; while the fairest ladies of the place met him in festal attire, and greeted him with song and music. But the proudest moment of all was when, led by a procession crowned with flowers, he was escorted to the Capitol, and in that historic place, surrounded by princes and nobles, was greeted with loud huzzas from the assembled multitudes. But not even the flattery of Rome could tempt Conradino to linger long from the country of his fathers, nor deter him from the object with which he had entered Italy. He only waited to rest his troops and for them to collect some of the treasures hidden away in churches and monasteries, before he continued his march into Neapolitan territory, accompanied by Henry of Spain and an army that now numbered five thousand.

On hearing of his enemy's approach King

Charles advanced by forced marches to meet him, and on the Plain of Tagliacozzo, divided only by the narrow River Salto, the two armies encamped. That of Charles numbered only three thousand, so that superior numbers, enthusiastic followers, and a just cause all seemed in favour of the young King. How all these advantages failed to ensure success, the sequel will show.

From the very beginning craft worked against Conradino, and where an astute brain and experienced judgment were ready to help his enemy his own youth and inexperience were powerless.

In the first place great rejoicings took place in the Ghibelline camp by the arrival in it of certain ambassadors professing to come from the neighbouring town of Aquila, who, with much display of pomp, presented some keys, which they said were those of the town, to Conradino, declaring at the same time that the inhabitants were all faithful to him, and looked to him for deliverance from Charles. Conradino, with all the eager hopefulness of his youth and temperament, accepted the good

news in its literal truth, but not so the wily Charles when the report brought a corresponding depression to his forces. It was the middle of the night when these bad tidings reached him in his camp; but rest never entered into the French King's calculations, and he at once determined to discover the truth for himself. With that wonderful energy and recklessness of danger which were largely the secret of his success he immediately set out for Aquila attended by only a few followers, and never drew rein until he reached the gates. There he sent one of his men forward to ask for whom the place was held, and on receiving the ready answer, "For King Charles!" he ordered the gates to be opened, rode through them, and after exhorting the guards to keep a very careful watch, returned as fast as his horse could carry him to the camp, which he reached in the early hours of the morning.

The fact was that the incident of the keys was all a trick got up by certain Ghibellines, hoping thus to encourage their side and cause dismay on the other—an object the latter part of which the

astuteness and determination of Charles thus defeated.

The next morning Aquila gave a pleasing proof of its loyalty to Charles. In the early hours some of the soldiers were puzzled to see a mass of people moving slowly across the open country between the town and the camp. They watched it with curiosity, for the pace was too slow for soldiers, and yet who else would be likely to approach a camp on the eve of battle? But as they drew nearer the problem was solved, and the moving crowd seen to consist of women and girls, bearing provisions on their heads, and guarded on either side by armed youths.

Even the iron frame of Charles seems to have been weary after his hurried and perilous expedition to Aquila, and Villani thinks it worthy of record that on his return "he laid him down, and slept"; but not for long was he able to indulge in well-earned repose.

While he slept Conradino, too much excited by the false news of Aquila's surrender to delay operations longer, hurried forward to cross the river,

and it was by the battle-cry of the approaching Ghibellines that Charles was aroused from his brief repose. The order of battle had, however, been carefully arranged beforehand, and it was the work of but a short interval for every man to be at his appointed post. But Charles for once was not to lead his army into the field. Inequality of numbers was to be met by strategy, and the tall form bearing the royal insignia, whom the opposing force naturally took to be that of the French King, was in reality one of his knights, named Henry of Cosence, who counterfeited him. Nor did the two divisions of the army, which advanced to defend the bridge and intercept the enemy's advance, represent the whole of the force, as it appeared to do. In a neighbouring thicket were concealed, not only Charles himself, but the flower of his followers.

Everything at first encouraged the idea of an easy victory to Conradino. His army succeeded in crossing the bridge over the Salto, and a deadly conflict ensued on the farther shore, and when at last the supposed figure of King Charles fell,

wounded to death, and his followers fled in every direction across the plain, the Ghibellines made sure that the battle was at an end and the victory theirs, and accordingly began to scatter in every direction, some in pursuit of the flying enemy, and some in search of booty. But in truth the battle had as yet but just begun. From a little eminence above the place where his troops lay hidden Charles watched this defeat of his army with hardly restrained impatience, and probably would, at an earlier stage, have rushed into the fray had it not been for the prudent advice of a veteran warrior named Alard de Saint-Valary, to whose sage judgment he had entrusted much of the plan of action for the day.[1] By him he was prevailed upon to wait until the enemy were completely scattered, and off their guard.

At last the longed-for moment arrived, and at the words from the watchful Alard, "Let the banners set forth, for now it is time!" the whole concealed army emerged, and flocked on to the field.

[1] See Dante, Inferno XXVIII. 17-18.

Conradino and some of his followers saw this armed body approach as they rushed to and fro exultant and unprepared, but so secure were they in their victory that they took it to be part of their own force, and at first paid no heed. But swifter and swifter swept on King Charles's men, and soon their mistake was proved to the deluded Ghibellines by the flight of arrows and the blows of the battle-axe.

From the first they had no chance. While they were already spent and weary from the battle this new force on the enemy's side entered it fresh and untried, and when, in addition, the French troops, which had started to flee, returned and joined their comrades, there soon remained for Conradino no choice but that between flight or capture. Only when this was put to him by some of the older Ghibellines, and he realised that the one hope for his cause rested in his escape, did he consent to abandon the field, and, accompanied by Frederick of Austria and others of his followers, he took to flight. Again it was the calm self-possession of Alard which at this juncture

saved the day to the Guelphs, and above all the tumult and din of battle his clear voice was heard entreating the King to keep the men together, and to restrain their impatient zeal as, on seeing the flight of Conradino, they made ready to follow.

Well it was for the King that he obeyed this advice, for danger was not yet over, and the unexpected appearance of Henry of Spain, who had left the field in pursuit of the French, gave the battle a fresh turn. At first Henry made the same mistake which proved fatal to Conradino, and took this new body of the enemy for part of the Ghibelline army; but soon discovering the truth, and seeing that the aspect of things had completely changed during his absence, he prepared, gallant soldier that he was, for one great attempt at resistance. And now the position was somewhat reversed, for it was Charles's troops who were weary with their recent attack on Conradino, while Henry and his Spaniards came up comparatively fresh, and at first the prospect looked bad for the Guelphs. But strategy once more came to their assistance, and by a trick played on the Spaniards

the cunning old Alard finally won the day. He had followed the one plan all through of letting the enemy scatter, while the army of Charles held together, and now, once more to accomplish this, he turned with a number of soldiers in pretended flight, when the Spaniards again fell into the trap, and started in pursuit, leaving broken ranks into which Charles immediately rushed with his men. Then, in the words of Villani, was the battle indeed "hot and strong"; for the Spaniards, perceiving their fatal error too late, closed with the enemy in a hand-to-hand contest. In vain did the French cavalry meet them, and with sword thrust endeavour to unseat them from their horses; and at last, desperate at the stubborn resistance of these brave knights, they gave up the ordinary methods of warfare, and proceeded to drag them off by main force.

This brought the battle to an end; the Spaniards, powerless against an attack where mere valour seemed of no avail, were soon utterly defeated. Some fled, many others lay dead or dying in the field. Henry himself, with some few followers,

made his escape to the Abbey of Monte Cascino, where in order to obtain shelter he declared to the Abbot that Charles had been defeated; but he was not believed, and was eventually given over to the enemy. Charles himself, with all his army, remained for the whole night on the field of Tagliacozzo, where, in the battle to be known hereafter by that name, he had once more triumphed for himself and the Guelph cause.

CHAPTER XVII

AN INNOCENT VICTIM

THE last chapter in the story of Conradino has now to be written.

On leaving the battlefield he and his followers made for the coast, hoping thus to reach the shores of Sicily, and to secure the crown there. They reached it in safety, and actually set sail; but Conradino was never to set foot on that fair island where his grandfather had held a dazzling Court. Some gentlemen of the Frangipani, a family which had been friendly to Frederick, turned traitor to the cause of his grandson, and, perceiving that the boat contained German fugitives, started in pursuit. The discovery of the exalted rank of their captives when overtaken induced them to lead them to the King himself, in return for which service Charles gave the Frangipani an estate in Neapolitan territory.

Conradino was thus thrown entirely on the

mercy of Charles, and to those who knew the relentless nature of the King the fate of his youthful opponent admitted of little doubt. Conradino was the last of his race. As long as he lived the Ghibellines would not cease to agitate in defence of the lawful heir, but once dead there would be no one with so good a claim as Charles, who held the throne by the double right of conquest and possession. Disaffection was already spreading through the length of both Naples and Sicily, and though crushed for the moment the cause of the boy-King was not yet hopeless in the land where his race had been honoured. To Charles there seemed no alternative: the boy must die. Yet even he did not venture to carry out his remorseless intention without some pretence at justice; a court must be summoned, and the form of a trial gone through. At Naples, before a body of judges carefully selected by Charles as favourable to himself, Conradino and his associates were accused of rebellion against their lawful sovereign, of contempt of the Papal sentence, and of having pillaged the Roman monasteries.

But even amid this hostile company the young King was not left undefended. One of the judges appointed to condemn him rose, and urged the strong claims that Conradino had on the mercy of his enemy. He pointed out that in the first place, as a prisoner of war, he was entitled to protection from the conqueror; that, as regarded his attempt to seize the throne, he had at anyrate sufficient right for such an attempt not to be criminal; and that it was his soldiers and not he himself who were responsible for the spoiling of the monasteries. Finally, he pleaded that, even if all the accusations against him were to be proved, the tender years of the prisoner still entitled him to mercy. But in Charles this quality was entirely lacking. Neither the youth nor the courage of his antagonist touched one chord of pity in his breast. That Conradino must die was his ruling idea, and from this all the arguments in the world were powerless to turn him. He went through the form of consulting the Pope, but historians differ as to the reply received. Some say that he evaded the responsibility by saying

that a Pope could not counsel the death of anyone ; others that the answer showed more decided encouragement to Charles of his murderous revenge, and consisted of the laconic words: " The life of Conradino is the death of Charles, the death of Conradino is the life of Charles."

According to Villani, however, Clement not only withheld his consent from Charles, but severely blamed him, and for the credit of the Pope we may hope this was so.

It would have taken more than Papal disapproval to deter Charles from his fell purpose, though to even the judges the youth and pathetic story of Conradino appealed so strongly that one voice alone was found to vote for his death. Upon that one vote the King ordered the protonotary, a man named Robert of Bari, to pronounce the sentence.

Conradino was not present at his trial, and was quite unprepared for what had passed there. He was engaged in a game of chess with Frederick of Austria when Robert of Bari appeared before him to read his condemnation, and as the fatal

words which consigned him to a traitor's death were pronounced he sprang to his feet, with all the spirit of his race flashing from his eyes.

"Slave!" he cried, "do you dare to condemn as a criminal the son and heir of kings? Does not your master know that he is my equal, not my judge?"

But, seeing the hopelessness of protest, he controlled himself, and prepared to meet his fate with dignity, recognising that death is but the common fate of all, and only asking what crime there could be in a prince seeking his lawful heritage. One favour was all he sought, and that was that his faithful comrades might be spared, and when this was denied him he entreated that at least he might be the first to die, and thus be saved from witnessing the death of those who had sacrificed their lives for him.

No length of time for preparation was allowed to elapse, and on October 26th of that year 1268 a memorable scene took place by the blue waters of the Bay of Naples. In a large open space near the Carmelite Church an immense concourse of people was gathered, and in their midst stood the two

Kings, the condemner and the condemned—the one dark, bearded, bronzed, and in the full prime of life, the other only on the threshold of manhood, with a fair, handsome face, and the down hardly yet on his lip.

Now a solemn hush reigned over the vast assembly as Charles called upon the protonotary to read once more, in the hearing of all, the sentence which condemned Conradino as a traitor to the throne and an enemy to Holy Church. But hardly had the words escaped the lips of Robert of Bari when an unexpected incident sent a thrill of horror through the crowd.

Robert of Flanders, touched to the heart by the fair and noble aspect of the innocent victim, although brother-in-law to Charles and thus closely attached to his interests, sprang forward and, with the words, "It does not behove a miserable creature like you to condemn to death this brave and noble gentleman," struck the protonotary dead with a blow from his dagger.[1] He fell at the

[1] This incident has been disputed by some modern historians, but is related by both Malaspini CC., and Villani VII. 29.

very feet of Charles, who for once seems to have been too much awestruck to order punishment or even to offer protest.[1]

Nothing, however, could avert the fate of Conradino, who was already in the hands of the executioner. He himself unfastened his cloak, and, falling on his knees, commenced his last prayer, preparing with simple and pious dignity to meet his death as befitted a King. But suddenly a wave of recollection swept over the mind already turned heavenward, and in imagination he saw once more his German home on the wooded shores of Lake Constance, and his mother Elizabeth watching and weeping for him there. The dignity of his royal rank, the crowd, whose eyes were fixed on him, waiting to see him die—all for the moment were forgotten, as there rang from his lips the pathetic human cry :

"Oh! my mother! What anguish will be thine at hearing this news of me!"

Then his eyes fell again upon the crowd, many

[1] The chroniclers give as a reason the high favour in which Charles held Robert of Flanders, but that hardly seems enough in itself to explain his passive attitude.

of whom were now sobbing and shedding tears at the sad spectacle before them, and at the sight the spirit of his race rose again within him. For a moment he stood and faced them in all the beauty of his youthful grace, then divesting himself of his glove he flung it into their midst, as a pledge, the last he would ever give, and a challenge that his death should be avenged. The next moment his neck lay beneath the executioner's axe.

As the head fell young Frederick of Austria gave a cry of anguish, and, breaking loose from his guards, sprang forward to press a last kiss on the lips of his lifelong friend and companion ; but he was immediately seized by the executioner, and in death, as in life, shared the fate of his royal master.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROVENZANO SALVANI, THE NOBLE SIENESE

AFTER the death of Conradino Charles soon succeeded in quenching the rebellion through both Naples and the island of Sicily by a series of cruel acts. Ghibelline prisoners were not only put to death, but in many cases tortured first; the bodies of his victims even when of royal blood were buried in unconsecrated ground and without the rites of religion. In Rome those who had taken up the cause of Conradino had their legs amputated, and were afterwards burnt.

The example of the King was followed by his subordinates. In Sicily, the town of Augusta, taken through the treachery of six of the inhabitants, was given over to a general and indiscriminate massacre, to be followed by a public execution of the survivors. Not a single inhabitant escaped. Even the six traitors who had delivered the town into the enemy's hands were given over

to the executioner, and the few who managed to reach the shore and embark there overcrowded the vessel, and thus perished in the waves. By these sanguinary and ferocious methods did Charles reassert his power and establish the Guelph cause through the length and breadth of the land. But a rule which is built upon cruelty and injustice, and has not the love of the people for its foundations, rests on no secure footing. Retribution was to follow; but for a later page the story of the tyrant's downfall must be reserved, and we now have to return once more to Tuscany.

The effect on Florence of this victory to the Guelphs was to encourage the citizens to settle their long-standing quarrel with Ghibelline Siena, and to wipe out the stain on their honour left by the defeat of Monteaperto. The Sienese themselves were quite as eager to meet their old enemy once more, and were encouraged to do so by their ruler, who at this time was one named Provenzano Salvani, a man of brave and warlike character, who had distinguished himself at Monteaperto,

and had won still further the esteem of his countrymen by the following noble and disinterested act of friendship. A friend of Salvani's named Vinea had fought under Conradino at Tagliacozzo, and had there been taken prisoner. Charles treated him with less apparent cruelty than most of his prisoners, for he spared his life, but only on the condition that a ransom of ten thousand gold florins be paid within a month. If this sum were not forthcoming in the time Vinea was to die. Our knowledge of Charles does not make it seem improbable that he felt sure the ransom could never be raised, and that this one recorded act of apparent generosity may have been only resorted to as an additional means of tormenting his victim. If so, he was destined to be baffled, for Vinea had a more devoted friend than Charles was likely to calculate upon, and this friend was Salvani. When the news reached Siena he immediately set to work to try and raise the money by every means in his power; but in spite of all his efforts he was soon brought face to face with the sad truth that it was quite impossible

to do so, and that neither from his own resources nor those of Vinea's family was so large a sum obtainable. Salvani, however, fortunately for his friend, was a man of resolute will, and having once determined to save Vinea nothing would shake him from his purpose. Accordingly, as no other course seemed available, he had a bench covered with carpet placed in the public square of Siena, and standing on this, in order to be raised above the heads of passers-by, so that all might see him, he himself, proud and haughty Ghibelline though he was, sought alms from the citizens until the whole amount was collected.

This fine action of Salvani's probably made a profound impression at the time, and it is conceivable that Dante, then a child of four in Florence, may have heard his elders relate it. Later, as it is hardly necessary to remind the reader, he paid a tribute to it in his great work.[1]

In June 1269 the Ghibellines sallied forth from Siena to meet the foe. The army consisted of fourteen hundred horse and eight thousand foot,

[1] See Dante, Purgatorio XI. 120-138.

and had a hero for one leader and a coward for another, for while Salvani was at its head there was with him our old acquaintance, Count Guido.[1] They marched into Florentine territory, and encamped outside the fortress of Colle. The news of the invasion reached Florence one Friday evening, and immediately the sound of the great bell was heard through the town, the troops once more gathered from the various quarters, and by early the next morning an army had started for Colle under the leadership of Messer Giambertaldo, King Charles's representative.

So eager were the impatient Florentines to meet the enemy that the cavalry arrived at Colle on the morning of the following day, and when the Sienese broke up their camp to seek a place of greater safety, this portion of the army, joined by some of the inhabitants of Colle, started in pursuit, without waiting for the infantry to arrive. They came up with the enemy at no great distance, and, in spite of their inferior numbers and the incompleteness of the army, prepared at once for attack.

[1] See Chapter XV.

Aldobrandini of the Pazzi family, urged perhaps by motives of revenge for his kinsman's fate at Monteaperto, volunteered to bear the standard, and with the words, "I take it to the honour of God and to the victory of our commonwealth," plunged boldly forward into the midst of the enemy's ranks.

In spite of the rashness of this attack the Florentines were completely victorious, and Monteaperto was at last avenged. The two Sienese leaders behaved in characteristic fashion. As soon as the battle began to go against them Guido turned his back to it, and fled to a place of safety; while Provenzano Salvani, on the other hand, fought to the last, and was taken prisoner, and beheaded. The Florentines placed his head on the point of a lance, and carried it through the camp for everyone to see, thus fulfilling, in a way not expected by the Sienese, a prophecy which was said to have been made by the devil.

It seems, according to Villani, who tells the story in all good faith, that before starting on the expedition to Colle, Salvani had summoned his

Satanic Majesty with incantations, and asked him how he would fare on it.

The devil's reply was:

"Thou goest to conquer, not to die in the battle, and thy head shall be the highest in the field."

But this, as Villani is careful to point out, was not a mistake on the part of the devil, but on the part of Salvani, who took the meaning wrongly, and interpreted it to his own advantage. It all seems to have been simply the matter of a comma, and the sense should have been: "Thou goest to conquer *not*, to die in the battle, and thy head shall be the highest in the field," and the prophecy, according to this reading of it, came literally true. Now all this, to give Villani's moral to the story, proves how foolish it is to place trust in prophecies uttered by so clever a master of lies as the devil.

CHAPTER XIX

REVENGE ON AN ENGLISH PRINCE

One incident, though from outside the walls of Florence, must be given here, if only because of its close connection with the history of our own country, an English prince being the central figure in it.

It has been mentioned, that when Guy of Montfort entered Italy with the land forces of Charles, he was there to find an opportunity for the revenge of his father's death at Evesham. That opportunity now occurred. At Viterbo in the year 1271 the Court of Cardinals had assembled to elect a new Pope; and thither hurried Charles, anxious to have a voice in the matter, and to see that no one was appointed who would clash with his own interests. He had with him at this time the English Prince, Henry Plantagenet, who was on his way home from the Crusades. This young man was a nephew of Henry III. of England, and his father was Richard of Cornwall, the husband of Queen

Beatrice's sister Sanzia, so he was also, of course, nephew by marriage to King Charles. It was at Viterbo that his tragic fate overtook him, for there at the same time was his cousin,[1] Guy of Montfort. Quite unsuspicious of the lurking danger and of the plot which had been formed against him, the English Prince was kneeling one day at the high altar of the principal church in Viterbo, taking part in the most solemn part of the church's service, when Guy of Montfort approached from behind, and, undeterred by the sacred character of the scene, pierced him to the heart with his dagger. Then turning from the proof of his cowardly crime, and leaving the lifeless body of his victim at the altar steps, he joined the associates, who waited for him at the church's door, with the exultant cry: "I am avenged!"

It would seem that indeed he was, and that no further act could be required by even the most exacting laws of vengeance. But not so thought one of those present.

[1] Simon of Montfort married Eleanor, sister of Henry III. and Richard of Cornwall.

" Your father was not only slain, but dragged," he hissed, alluding to the barbarous custom of trailing the bodies of slaughtered enemies from the field.

Acting on this sinister suggestion, Guy immediately returned to the church, and had actually the further audacity to drag his royal victim's corpse by the hair, in sight of all, to the square outside. There it was left exposed to the public gaze, while the murderer sought refuge at his father-in-law's castle near at hand.

It is one more blot on the character of Charles that he seems to have taken no steps to punish his own subordinate for this cowardly murder of one who had such special claims on his protection.

Simon de Montfort had been killed in fair fight and in the open field, but Henry was struck down from behind, and when under that shelter which even in warfare is considered sacred.

Young Edward of England, King Henry's eldest son, afterwards Edward I., had also been on the crusade, and reached Viterbo shortly after his cousin's murder. His chivalrous nature was

stirred by it to deep feelings of wrath against Charles, and afterwards, when he came to the throne, they were never effaced from his memory. He had Henry's heart enclosed in a golden casket, and took it with him to England, where it is said to have been placed on a pillar at the entrance to London Bridge, as a perpetual reminder of this outrage to his house.[1]

On his way home from Viterbo, Edward broke his journey at Florence, when he seems to have stayed some little time, and to have been well entertained; while in return he conferred the honour of knighthood on a great many of the citizens, and gave them presents of horses and of all knightly accoutrements.

[1] See Villani VII. 39, and Dante, Inferno XII. 120.

CHAPTER XX

THE CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

CHARLES OF ANJOU was now at the height of his power, but, with ambition not yet satisfied, he sought still further to increase it. His restless eyes were turned towards the far-off Eastern Empire on the one hand, and to those parts of Italy where he held only partial sway on the other, when unforeseen events at last turned Fortune's wheel against him.

He had claimed a kingdom to which he had no hereditary right, and slain both princes of the lawful house, and since then had sought to crush out every spark of opposition to his own unjust rule by every conceivable act of cruelty. In all that he had undertaken he had so far been successful, but his tyranny was not to be allowed to continue unchecked to the end.

When Conradino stood on the scaffold, an innocent victim to a hopeless cause, one of his last

acts before his head fell had been, as may be remembered, to fling his glove to the crowd. That pledge had not been altogether forgotten and neglected. It is said that after the tragic scene had closed one present had dipped the glove in the blood of the dead Prince, and afterwards conveyed it to the Court of Constance, the daughter of King Manfred, and wife of Peter III. of Aragon. As the last survivor of her ill-starred race, the Queen of Aragon seemed the fitting person to avenge the death of her young kinsman; but other motives besides those of revenge worked against Charles and hurried forward the impending revolution. It was in Sicily that the cruelties and oppression of the King and of his French soldiers were most displayed, and it was in Sicily that the smouldering fires of hatred against them sprang into a blaze. But the spirit of rebellion was encouraged from outside, and from the land where Conradino's pledge rested came the necessary impetus and the new candidate for the throne. Something is due to Peter of Aragon, much more to John of Procida. This nobleman owned the

small island of Procida, outside Naples and at one time practised the science of medicine very successfully. In the capacity of Court physician he had been the friend of Frederick II., and later of Manfred, and his attachment to the royal house which he served did not end with the death of his master at Benevento. The entry of Conradino found him in arms for his cause, and the death of the young King, and subsequent confiscation of his own property, left him with still more burning feelings of hatred against the enemy of the Hohenstaufens. It is said to have been he who accepted the challenge of Conradino and conveyed it to Constance, and certainly at the Court of Aragon he found a refuge and a warm welcome. Here in this new land his losses were made good to him by the grant of land, money, and titles; but his nature was too noble to find in these compensation for the misfortunes of his leaders, or for those sufferings of his countrymen with which letters from friends in the two Sicilies kept him constantly acquainted.

It was he who, morally at anyrate, accepted the

dying challenge of his young master, and his whole soul was absorbed in schemes of vengeance, by which the usurper might be overthrown, and a juster and fairer rule secured for his native land.

Again and again he urged Peter and Constance to take up the cause of Sicily, pointing out that to them alone could the Sicilians in their misery look for succour, and that it was a duty as well as a right to fulfil these hopes of the oppressed people, since on Constance lay the responsibility of alone representing the line that had ruled there. But to attack an enemy not only so powerful in himself as Charles, but supported also by so formidable an ally as the Church, required both more courage and more money than Peter of Aragon possessed. Nothing daunted by the want of encouragement from headquarters, John sought at once to meet this latter difficulty by selling the whole of his new possessions in order to devote the value to the cause so near his heart. With the proceeds he started on a lengthy tour. To his versatile nature nothing came amiss, and his

unquenchable courage and burning zeal aided his fertile imagination in devising methods to promote his object. Now we find him in the disguise of a poor friar passing, without recognition, through unfrequented paths of Sicily, and everywhere stirring up the spirit of revolt, and preparing fuel for a conflagration. Next he is at the far-off Court of Constantinople, and, as an accomplished courtier, persuading the Emperor of the East that his cause is a just one, and obtaining promises of help in money. This achieved, the indefatigable traveller hastens to Rome, and even the Pope, Nicholas III., is won over by that eloquent tongue and fiery, resolute soul, and gives him a written consent that Constance shall have his support in claiming the land of her forefathers. Then, encouraged by his successes, John hurries back to stir up the indolent Peter with his news.

Hardly had John, however, reached Barcelona when an event occurred which might have crushed a more courageous spirit, for the death of the powerful ally he had just won, in the person of Nicholas III., was a great damper on the tidings

he had for the King; but to compensate for it the fertile brain of Procida soon devised fresh schemes to further his plans. He himself set off again at once for the Court of Constantinople to hasten the supplies promised by the Emperor, and while thus engaged he had arranged for ambassadors to be sent to the new Pope, Martin IV., from Sicily to complain of the French rule, and from Aragon to congratulate him on his election, and to ask canonisation for Brother Raymond, a saintly monk who had died five years before. But Martin IV. was merely a creature of King Charles, by whom his election had been secured, and each of these embassies failed signally.

The Sicilians chose as their ambassadors the Bishop of Pacto and a Dominican friar. They reached the Papal Court, which was assembled at Viterbo, to be denied a private interview, and when summoned to appear before the full Court of Cardinals they found, to their dismay, that Charles himself was among those gathered to hear their protest against his rule. The Bishop, with a most noble courage, delivered his address nevertheless,

and after reciting the story of his country's woes turned directly to Charles, and entreated him to end them. The King listened in a grim and sardonic silence, and his answer to this brave appeal was an order to the guards to seize both messengers as they left his presence. The Bishop managed to escape from the prison into which he was cast, and returned to Sicily to still further excite the people by the account of this outrage. The Dominican died a lingering death in a Neapolitan dungeon.

The Aragonese ambassadors, though less badly treated, met with no more success. Martin seemed little impressed by the virtues and miracles of the dead monk for whom canonisation was sought, although he was said to have raised as many as forty people from the dead and to have sailed across the seas in no stronger vessel than his own cloak, and when the real object of the mission was allowed to transpire, and the ambassadors ventured to remind Martin of the claim of Constance to the Sicilian crown, he flew into a rage, and bade them tell their master, the King of Aragon, that before

asking favours of the Pope he should pay with the arrears the annual tribute promised to the Church by his grandfather.

Procida, however, met with better success on his own mission, and he returned from Constantinople with a large amount of gold, which enabled Peter to prepare an army and fleet ostensibly for a new crusade to the Holy Land, but with the secret object of attacking the French in Sicily. With this intention he made a pretence of warfare against the Moors in Northern Africa, and off that coast awaited the course of events; while John, with indefatigable energy, passed among the Sicilians in various disguises, providing them with arms, stirring them up with promises of speedy deliverance, and exciting in them the feelings of hatred against the French by which he himself was animated. His method was not to form plots, but simply to work on the already inflammable material by exciting the passions of the people; but he also persuaded the more powerful inhabitants of the interior to enter Palermo, and mix there with the citizens, so that, unknown to

the French, they should be ready to direct the popular movement when it arose.

Everything was thus prepared for Peter of Aragon when an event, small in itself, served as a spark to the fuel sooner than was expected, and precipitated the revolution.

On Easter Eve of the year 1282 the inhabitants of Palermo flocked, as was their annual custom, to keep that festival at the church of Monreale, about three miles from the town. Men, women, and children, some walking, some on horseback, crowded along the country roads in festal attire. The hardships inflicted on them by the French were for the moment put aside with the light-heartedness of their race, and the air was filled with gay laughter and song. Service was attended at the church, and then, under the trees just bursting into leaf, tables were spread, and later games and dances took place on the meadows bright with numerous spring flowers. It was one of those scenes of simple mirth and festivity which can only be properly appreciated beneath the bright sunshine of southern skies. Suddenly a

cloud seemed to gather over everything, and a chill fell on the spirits of those assembled, as a body of French soldiers appeared, and began to mingle among them under pretext of keeping the peace and of seeing that no arms were borne, it being against the law for Sicilians to carry them when pleasure-making. Gloomy glances followed the soldiers as they moved to and fro, and insolent remarks from some of the young Sicilians, reminding them that they were not wanted, excited suspicion in their minds. They drew together in little knots, whispering that the Sicilians must have disobeyed the rule about arms or they would never be so daring, and then, quietly dispersing, they every here and there insisted on searching the persons of those they met for hidden weapons. Among the Sicilians there was one young girl, especially noted for her beauty, to whom this day was more than an ordinary festival, for she was accompanied by one who, with the willing consent of her parents and brothers, had just become her betrothed. The two young people had together joined in the service of their church, and with

hearts filled with happiness had taken part in the general merry-making. Now, leaving the others, they again turned towards the church, the girl leaning on the arm of her future husband, and both engaged in happy conversation. In a moment an event occurred which changed not only the aspect of the day for them, but the whole future history of Sicily. A French soldier named Drouet, struck by the beauty of the girl, made his search for arms an excuse to approach her, and, before her bridegroom had time to interfere, laid such rough hands upon her that the poor girl fainted with alarm. The young Sicilian, beside himself with wrath, as he held her unconscious form to his heart, gave vent to the fatal cry: "Death to the French! Death to the French!"

It was caught up only too readily by the rest of the crowd, and one young man standing near seized the sword of the soldier, and with his own weapon pierced him to the heart.

The evening hour had now drawn near, but as the solemn vesper bell sounded through the still air it was accompanied by a scene of indescribable

horror and confusion. The pent-up hatred of the hot-blooded Sicilians found vent at last. Unarmed though they were, they turned on the French with such fury that then and there they slew two hundred. The women and children present for their merry-making were witnesses of this appalling spectacle; but the revolution, which from the hour of its occurrence has for ever after been known as the Sicilian Vespers, had only now just begun. The massacres of Benevento or, nearer home, of Augusta, were not forgotten, and payment to the utmost farthing for the fell deeds committed there was to be enacted. Those who had left Palermo in holiday attire and with jest and song, returned with blood-stained garments and voices hoarse with the cry: "To death, to death with the French!" In the market-place they soon gathered, and formed some sort of organisation; then through the town echoed shrieks and groans as they passed from street to street, slaying every French person there, regardless of sex or age. In that one night alone four thousand are said to have been massacred.

The example set by Palermo spread throughout the island; everywhere the French were slaughtered and the rule of Charles overturned. Messina, which harboured the last refugees of the French, held out the longest; but on April 28th the final remnant of Charles's soldiers were driven out from there also, and sent across the sea. At the same time a deputation invited Peter of Aragon to claim the kingdom, which was prepared to welcome him. In one month the revolution had been accomplished, and the island of Sicily lost to the French King for ever.

When the news of the Sicilian Vespers was brought to Charles at Rome some presage of what it portended seems to have seized him, and, with the idea perhaps of propitiating the Deity, he uttered the prayer: "My God, if it please Thee to send me ill fortune, let my downfall at least come with gentle steps."

But this spirit of pious resignation was much too superficial to be sustained. As news of the further spread of the revolution and the loss of his dominions overtook him, the wrath of the tyrant

found expression in fierce invectives against the Sicilians, and gnawing the top of his sceptre, a favourite habit of his when disturbed, he uttered vows of the most deadly vengeance against the whole island—vows which he had never the opportunity to fulfil, or one more of her blackest pages would have been added to History's record.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TYRANT'S DOWNFALL

It would have seemed at first sight that it could be no great task for Charles, with a large army at his command, to punish the rebellious Sicilians and regain possession of the island. But to the tyrants of the world, who for a time seem to carry everything before them, retribution is generally found to follow, and we find the eternal purpose which underlies the designs of men fulfilled in their despite. So it was with Charles of Anjou; and the hour of his downfall had come.

With a large army of his own troops, aided by a number of Italian Guelphs, a picked contingent of which were Florentines, he set sail for Sicily, and in July was outside Messina, to find a landing impossible. Opposed to the powerful force outside was a mere handful composed of the inhabitants, but an indomitable determination to prevent the hated French from returning supplied

the lack of numbers. Even the women, some of the fairest in the world, and the young children, gave ready help, and where on one side the town lay exposed, giving the enemy a chance to enter, it was by their tender hands that stones and mortar were carried to the spot, so that in three days a strong wall of defence was raised.

The Sicilians, however, did not wish for war; they were only too anxious for peace if it could be secured with any prospect of a just rule; and when they heard that the Pope had sent a legate named Cardinal Gerard, the news raised eager hopes that he was willing to help them, and that by this means terms of peace might be arranged. In all innocence of the real nature of his mission they invited the Cardinal into their midst, and escorted him with joy to the citadel. There Da Lentini, the head of the garrison, offered him the keys of the town, begging him to accept them in the name of the Church, to whose rule the citizens would willingly submit. The Cardinal's reply soon dispelled the happy dream, and changed the spirit of humble submission with which he had been received into one

of fiery indignation. When in haughty tones he bade them not to mention terms to their sovereign, King Charles, and to trust themselves entirely to him, Da Lentini rose in the fiercest wrath, and before the astonished prelate could realise what was happening he seized his staff from him, while he shouted in passionate tones :

" To Charles never ! to the French never ! as long as we have blood to shed and swords to wield ! "

The people around eagerly caught up the cry, and the Cardinal was sent back to the French fleet charged with a message telling " the tyrant " that " never more should lions and foxes enter into Messina." In vain did the outraged monarch swear and fume and gnaw his sceptre in his wrath ; in vain did he attack Messina and seek to be revenged on his insolent and presumptuous subjects there. The brave little band of men, women, and children within the walls were fully determined to defend it with their life blood or to die of starvation rather than to yield. And at last their courage and patience were rewarded. At the moment

when supplies were nearly exhausted, when the gaunt figure of famine stalked through the streets of the town, and death from starvation stared the inhabitants in the face, an unexpected deliverance came.

John of Procida has not been mentioned since the outbreak of the revolution, of which he was the main instigator, but his indefatigable energy had still been quietly working for the achievement of his great object. During the siege of Messina he had travelled across the island, and set sail for Northern Africa, where Peter of Aragon was still making a pretence of fighting the Moors. The result was that the Spanish fleet set sail for Messina, and Charles found himself attacked on the seas by a much more formidable enemy than the one which baffled him on land.

For the first time his resolute courage seems to have begun to fail him now, and the fiery spirit which formerly nothing disturbed, was subject to attacks of gloom and despondency.

It was in one such mood, following a severe repulse by the Messinese, that Peter's ambassador

found him when he brought his master's declaration of war.

The King received him in such state as the ship could afford, seated on a bed covered with rich draperies by way of a throne, but when he heard King Peter's message his agitation was shown by the gnawing of his sceptre. A message of contempt and challenge was returned; but Charles was really unprepared for the attack, and his practical answer was given to a very different tune. As the Spanish vessels drew near he withdrew his fleet, and returned to the mainland, and the island of Sicily was freed from the tyrant at last. It was thus it became entirely separate from the kingdom of Naples, and passed from the house of Anjou to that of Aragon. Other misfortunes to Charles rapidly followed, including the capture and imprisonment of his eldest son, and in 1285, broken down at last by disappointed hopes and thwarted ambition, he died.

CHAPTER XXII

FLORENCE IN ARMS AGAIN

In 1288 war was declared between Florence and the neighbouring state of Arezzo. The downfall and death of Charles had given new encouragement to the Ghibellines, and in Arezzo they banished the Guelphs, who sought the support of the Florentines. Thus the old party cry was again heard, and in Florence the deep note of the Toscin rang out, and the streets once more echoed with the clang of arms and the tramping feet of horses and men. On May 23rd the national banner was displayed to all for eight days in the Abbey of Ripoli; "for such," says Villani, "was the custom of the Florentines in those days, who through a lofty pride and greatness of mind wished to make it known both to the foe and the whole world that they were going to war." At the end of the time allowed for this challenge there issued forth from the gates of Florence an armed force larger than

any that had left there since the fatal day which led to Monteaperto. Of these only eight hundred horsemen and three hundred foot were Florentines; but the neighbouring towns of Lucca, Prato, and others, each sent a good contingent, so that the total number was about one thousand six hundred horse and ten thousand foot.

As this allied army marched through Aretine territory castle after castle surrendered to it, forty thus falling in twenty-one days. One alone, that of Laterino, held out for so long as eight days, and as it was well defended and provisioned for three months the general in command was severely blamed for giving in so soon, and could find no better excuse for his conduct than a pun on his name of Lupo (wolf), since wolves, so he said, were unaccustomed to confinement. Thus triumphantly, and with no serious opposition, the allies came to the outskirts of the town of Arezzo, where they were further strengthened by a contingent of Sienese Guelphs who joined them there. The Aretines, however, were wise enough not to venture into the open, and behind the shelter of

their well-defended walls little harm could reach them, though they had the mortification of seeing the enemy destroy the gardens and vineyards of the fertile district outside, and come so near to the gates that the great elm-tree, under whose shade they were accustomed to seek recreation, was cut down before their eyes.

On the eve of S. John the Baptist's day a tremendous storm of wind and rain swept over the Guelph camp, tearing many of the tents into ribbons, and doing so much damage that it was determined to give up the siege of Arezzo, and return home. But before departing the Florentines prepared one last insult for the enemy, and kept the festival of their national saint as if they were at home, holding their games and races at the very gates of the city and under the eyes of the enemy.

The next day the whole of the army which had left Florence quietly withdrew, and returned home.

This expedition was not, however, by any means the end of the war. The next year the Guelph cause was encouraged by the release of Charles II.,

the eldest son of Charles of Anjou, from the Spanish prison where he had been confined since his capture, and this led to another attack on the Aretines. The new King rested at Florence for three days on his way to his coronation at Rome, and was there received with much honour and rejoicing. When he started to continue his journey south the Florentines heard that the Aretines intended to waylay him, and as he had only a small escort they took alarm, and straightway sent out a contingent of their best horsemen and noblest knights with a large body of troops to protect him. Their services were not required, for the Aretines were afraid to venture against so large a force; but, nevertheless, they accompanied Charles well on his way, and in return were allowed to bear the royal standard with their own, and were given one of the King's captains, a certain Amerigo di Nerbona, with a hundred mounted men under him. Then joyfully the Florentines returned home, while the King pursued his journey to Rome.

A few weeks afterwards, on June 2nd 1289,

the Toscin again rang, and the Florentine army started out once more to meet the Aretines. They were joined by many allies as before; but the Aretines also had the support of the other Tuscan Ghibellines, and mustered a goodly army, though not such a large one as the Guelphs, whose horsemen were as many as two to one against theirs. In spite of this inferiority of number the Aretines treated their adversaries with insolent contempt and derision, and accused them of combing their hair and adorning themselves like women. In return, it does not seem improbable that the Florentines may have had a good laugh at the Aretines, and accused them of being led by a runaway and a coward, for the Podestà of Arezzo, who accompanied the army to the battle, was no other than Guido Novello of ignoble fame.[1]

The Aretines this time did not refrain from coming out into the open, and on the Plain of Campaldino the two armies confronted each other in order of battle. The Florentines and their allies were under the command of Amerigo di Ner-

[1] See above, pp. 127, 160, etc.

bona, and were arranged in the following order :— In front were one hundred and fifty picked knights, led by the burly Florentine merchant Vieri de' Cerchi, who insisted on filling this prominent position in spite of an injured leg, from which he was suffering at the time. On either side of these knights were two crescents, consisting of cross-bowmen and heavily armed foot soldiers carrying lances. Behind came the main body of horsemen, flanked also by infantry, and behind these the baggage, well guarded, and so placed as to serve for a defence if required. A little apart again was a reserve force under the command of the renowned Florentine noble Corso Donati, whose cousin, Gemma, a few years later became the wife of the poet Dante. Dante himself, aged twenty-four at the time, served in the front of the battle that day. Orders were given to Corso before the battle began to keep his reserve until it was called upon, under penalty of losing his head. We shall see later how he obeyed those orders.

The effect of this army from a little distance was of one dense, compact mass, and so closely packed

were the bucklers bearing the Florentine arms of a red lily on a white ground that the Bishop of Arezzo, who was short-sighted, on looking across the plain from his place on the opposite side, innocently asked what white wall it was that he saw before him, to receive the brief reply: "The Florentine bucklers."

The Florentines being thus drawn up ready for the fight, it only remained for their leaders to remind them of what they were expected to accomplish that day. Amerigo merely encouraged them by pointing out that it was against their old enemy the Ghibellines, whom they had so often overcome before, that they were now called upon once more to fight. But Mangiadore of Sanminiato, a veteran soldier, gave more definite words of advice. He told them that the tactics of war had somewhat changed since the days of their Tuscan fights, and that instead of an attack by onslaught it would be well for them to remain firm in their ranks, and wait for the enemy to begin.

The Ghibellines had meanwhile arranged their army on much the same plan as their enemy, but

instead of the one hundred and fifty picked knights of the Guelphs they chose out three hundred. When the whole army was drawn up in battle array the Bishop gave them a stirring address, and begged them to fight valiantly for the memory of their old greatness and for the glory and honour of the imperial cause.

Now all was ready, and the two armies stood expectant and eager for the fight; but the Guelphs, in accordance with the advice just received, restrained their impatience, and left it to the enemy to make the first move. They had not long to wait. The two opposing cries of "Ho! knights San Donato," and "Ho! knights Nerbona!" soon rang across the plain, and with a sweep and an onward rush the Aretines had charged into their midst.

Back pressed the Guelph knights before this fierce attack; but at the same moment the two wings of their army gathered rapidly together, the Ghibellines were enclosed in their midst, and the battle assumed much the character of a hand-to-hand encounter. The Bishop of Arezzo and

other of the leaders tried in vain to break through the enemy's infantry; but, amidst the blinding storm of dust and arrows, some of their followers crept underneath the Guelph horses, and by striking them thus with their daggers, succeeded in unhorsing the gallant riders. At this unexpected and unknightly mode of attack the second line of the army was pressed back on to the one behind, and, flushed with success, the Ghibellines thought the day theirs, and pressed still farther into the enemy's midst with brave yet careless daring.

Apart from the main body of the army, Corso Donati watched the battle with his soul all afire, impatient for that command which had as yet not been given. Now, unable to bear his inactivity any longer, he resolved at all costs to enter the conflict. "If we lose," he said, "I will die in battle with my fellow-citizens, and if we conquer let him who will come to exact the penalty of my head."

Then bidding his men follow him, he boldly charged the flank of the enemy, and by so doing turned the tide of the battle. At the same time a

misfortune overtook the Aretines in their own midst. Guido Novello no sooner saw that the battle was beginning to go against his side than, faithful to his character, and anxious at all costs to preserve his own person in safety, he galloped from the field, followed by all his men. In vain the Bishop of Arezzo, who was now hard pressed, called upon him for succour, and, finding himself deserted by this powerful ally, he plunged still deeper into the battle, and died as a brave man fighting. Many other Ghibelline leaders fell with him, and ere nightfall the Battle of Campaldino was one more added to the list of Florentine victories.

The news, according to Villani, was brought to Florence miraculously at the very hour when the victory occurred. The Priors of the city, who had kept awake by anxiety all the previous night, had fallen asleep at their official residence after dinner when they were suddenly aroused by a knock at the door, and at the same time a voice cried: "Arise, for the Aretines are discomfited." They immediately went to the door, but found no one, nor had their servant, who kept watch outside,

heard anyone approach. "And this," says Villani, "I know to be true, for I saw and heard it myself."

But great though this victory was the Florentines did not even now succeed in taking the town of Arezzo. Villani thinks that if they had followed up the battle by marching straight on it they would without doubt have done so, but instead they spent several days in attacking outlying fortresses, and while they were doing so the Aretines had time to return to the defence of their city. There they were joined also by many of the peasants from the country districts, so that when the Guelph allies arrived outside they found the place well defended by a body of brave men, who resisted all their attempts to take it. For twenty days they remained outside, laying waste the country round and building engines for attack, and insulting the Aretines as before by playing their national games under their very eyes. They even went so far as to cast contempt and reproach on the memory of the Bishop slain at Campaldino by throwing a number of dead asses with mitres

on their heads into the midst of the town. This last outrage was too much for Aretine patience, and a fierce battle ensued. The Florentines might apparently have won easily, for they reached a point where the town had no stronger defence than a palisade, which they soon burnt, but at the moment when it seems as if an assault by storm would have secured a victory, the trumpets for some unknown reason sounded a retreat. Villani's only explanation of this strange proceeding is that it was done for greed of gain, and he says that the captains were brought into great abomination by the Florentines in consequence, but how a retreat would attain that end he does not attempt to make clear. The result at anyrate was that the Aretines took courage, and, issuing out of the town on the next day, they burnt the wooden engines erected by the Guelphs, and did so much damage generally, that the idea of taking Arezzo was finally abandoned, and the bulk of the army returned to Florence.

The failure of this last part of the enterprise was, however, quite forgotten in the glory of the

victory of Campaldino, and the returning combatants were received at Florence with great honour and public rejoicing. A procession came out to meet them composed of the clergy, followed by the gentlemen of the town, and lastly by the citizens bearing the banners of their respective guilds; and a canopy of gold was borne on pikes by a body of knights, who held it over the heads of Amerigo and of the Podestà.

Thus with great rejoicing and display the victorious Florentines entered the city for which they had fought so well, and to which they brought a time of peace and prosperity such as had not been known there for long.

And now from the noise of battle and the tumult of war it is pleasant to turn to a scene associated only with happiness and peace; for during the years of comparative tranquillity which followed, Florence on every May Day testified to her joy and prosperity in a gay and picturesque manner.

At the corners of the streets and squares wooden pavilions were erected draped with brightly coloured cloths and silks, and in them gathered

bands of the noblest youths clad in new raiment, while through the streets passed processions of fair women and girls crowned with garlands, some playing quaint instruments, while the others danced two by two in stately order to the music. Games and pastimes of every description followed, and banquets and supper parties brought the festivities to a close.

They knew how to enjoy themselves as well as how to fight, did those old Florentines in their flower-encircled city!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE

THE feud between Guelph and Ghibelline was not, however, entirely suppressed in Florence now that she was at rest from outside warfare, but the original intention of the terms was sometimes lost sight of, and, roughly speaking, the Guelphs may now be considered as standing for those who sympathised with the middle and artisan classes in Florence, while the Ghibellines were the aristocratic section of the community. The old story of internal strife soon repeated itself, and not long after the Battle of Campaldino the haughty nobles were once more exciting wrath and indignation in the people by their arrogant conduct. It is at this time that a remarkable man, named Giano della Bella, steps on the scene as a leading figure in Florentine history. A noble by birth, Giano was of a singularly just and honourable character, and the oppression under which

the people suffered induced him to take up their cause and be instrumental in obtaining justice for them. The spirit of daring which led him into the thick of the fight at Campaldino, where his horse was shot under him, now led him to brave the enmity of his own class, and to fight with the moral weapons of persuasion and invective for the good of his country. As one of the Priors of Florence, he used his two months' term of office in an attempt to bring about a better state of things, and with this object he assembled the people, and gave them a stirring and impassioned address.

"Let us bestir ourselves!" he cried. "The government requires a head; we will create one to whom the standard of justice can be entrusted."

It was for justice combined with liberty above all that this noble-minded patriot fought. To stir up strife was the last thing he desired, as he proved later by the sacrifice of all he most valued for the sake of peace.

"Would to Heaven that we could all live amicably," he said: "but this proud aristocracy not only tramples on our laws, but, like some ferocious

wild beast, lashes its own side, and roars with ungovernable fury."

He proceeded to remind his hearers of the fierce private conflicts and deadly hates of the nobles; he drew attention to the brawls and constant murders which disturbed the streets, and asked how they could conscientiously delay the remedy for all these evils. The state was now at peace externally, since there was no war with any foreign power; and to what better use, he asked, could this period of tranquillity be devoted than that of reforming the internal condition of the commonwealth?

"Let us," he finally entreated, "improve this occasion, neglect of which may lead to our lasting sorrow."

The hearts of the people responded eagerly to the stirring strains of Giano's eloquence, and the result was the passing of a law called the *Ordinances of Justice,* which practically placed the government once more in the hands of the citizens, and protected them from the oppression of the nobles.

Giano's wish to have an officer appointed, to

whom the standard of justice should be entrusted, was also fulfilled by the election of the Gonfalonier, by whom in times of sedition the standard was to be raised as a rallying-point for all in favour of law and liberty. This office was not military, but was given to a civilian elected by the Priors.

The nobles, however, did not meekly submit to a law which not only excluded them from all part in the government, but ordained also most severe sentences for every offence they should commit against the people. In their indignation they declared, and not altogether without grounds, that they were made liable to punishment if a nobleman's horse happened to whisk its tail in a citizen's face, or if two persons of the opposing classes pushed against each other in a crowd, or even if two children of different rank quarrelled with each other at their play; and, in their own defence, they managed to pass another law, by which nobles when accused of offence against the people could only be judged by their own class. The result of such a law could not, of course, be the promotion of justice, as the nobles would be sure to favour

each other, and it was in consequence fiercely opposed by Giano, whose cry "Perish the city rather than justice!" was a constant testimony to his burning zeal in its cause.

Fiery, impetuous, outspoken, and daring, it is no wonder that Giano made bitter enemies by his attempts at reform, and soon became a marked man.

The nobles entered into a secret conspiracy against him, and many of them agreed to the sinister and murderous suggestion expressed in the words:

"If the shepherd be struck down his flock will soon scatter."

The idea of killing Giano was, however, eventually given up in favour of one even more base. This was no less than a plan to work his ruin by craft and cunning instead of by violence, and Giano became the unconscious victim, in which his own outspokenness and enthusiasm were used as weapons against him. Although the Ordinances of Justice had done much to restore law and order in Florence, the people were in some instances

far from being worthy of the power placed in their hands, and the judges were not always as upright as they should have been in punishing their excesses. This was particularly so in the case of a leading butcher named Pecora, a man of coarse, audacious character, by whom and his followers outrages were frequently committed, and overlooked by the judges. Out of this the nobles made capital, and at the public meetings enlarged on it, asking Giano what justice there was in such acts as these being permitted to pass unpunished. Then Giano would fall readily into the trap laid for him, and, his soul all up in arms, he would exclaim :

" May the city perish rather than this state of things be continued. Let laws be framed to repress such wickedness ! " At this the nobles would exchange secret smiles, well pleased at the success of their plans, and, hastening to the judges and butchers, would repeat Giano's words, and, by telling them that he meant to crush them with new laws, excite their fierce anger against him.

Among the nobles, however, Giano had one

friend, a man of simple and upright character, the historian Dino Compagni, from whose chronicle much of this chapter is taken. Dino went to Giano privately, and told him something of the plot against him. This put Giano on his guard in time, and before the nobles had been able to carry out another plot for his ruin other circumstances led to the downfall of their intended victim.

Corso Donati, whose name will be remembered as having turned the tide at Campaldino, is indirectly responsible for the unfortunate events about to be described.

For some unknown reason he had incited some of his followers to attack those of another Florentine named Simone Galastrone, and in the scuffle that ensued one of the latter was killed. The fault was clearly on the side of Corso, and the popular opinion never doubted that when the case had been brought before the Podestà this noble would be condemned. So certain were they that the Gonfalonier was actually ready with the standard of justice, waiting to see the expected sentence carried out. The friends of Corso, how-

ever, had meanwhile exerted themselves on his behalf, with the result that the Podestà declared him innocent, and pronounced instead a sentence of punishment against Galastrone for having inflicted wounds. The people, disappointed at not seeing so powerful a noble as Corsò punished, and furious at this gross miscarriage of justice, rushed out of the hall where the case had been tried in a sudden tumult, crying: "Death to the Podestà!" and "To arms, to arms! Long live the people!" And, with these cries still ringing from their lips, they came to Giano, for whose leadership in this sudden revolution they looked. Giano, however, anxious to prevent a conflagration, refused to take an active part with them, and tried instead to persuade them to go quietly to the palace of the Priors, and to range themselves under the peaceful banner of the Gonfalonier. But it was in vain that he tried to pour oil on the troubled waters of popular fury; the spirit of revolt and vengeance was not to be so easily quenched. As Giano would not accompany the people they proceeded without him to the Bargello, or official residence of the

Podestà, armed with crossbows and burning faggots. The outside gates of the palace soon fell, and the surging mass of revolutionists swept on to the great doorway. That too was next a blaze, and the interior of the house at their mercy. The Podestà, however, had meanwhile found time for a hurried flight. At the sound of blows and the sight of flames he, accompanied by his wife and family,[1] and also by Corso Donati, fled on to the roof, and by this means gained the friendly shelter of an adjoining house, where he remained in safety until the revolution was ended. The people meanwhile entered the premises, stole the horses and other valuable property, and destroyed all the papers on which they could lay hands.

The uproar was quieted in the course of a few days; but Giano's enemies seized the opportunity against him. A new body of Priors was hastily elected, and by them Giano was condemned as a leader and instigator of the disturbance, with which,

[1] As a rule the Podestà's family was not allowed to accompany him during his term of office. Apparently an exception was made in this particular case as Dino Compagni specially mentions the Podestà's wife as escaping with him.

as a matter of fact, he had had nothing to do. When the unjust sentence was pronounced a large body of the people rushed to the house of their beloved leader, and offered to protect him by force of arms, or, if he preferred it, to attack the city. But Giano would not have them do either. He saw himself deserted and betrayed by some of those whom he had trusted; for many of the popular party sided with the nobles against him, and his refusal to join the revolt made him enemies amongst those whom he had endeavoured to serve. He was thus condemned by one class of people for leading a movement which by the others he was blamed for not having joined. He also saw that if he remained in Florence party feeling would wax still higher, and the attempt of his faithful adherents to defend him against his enemies could hardly fail to result in civil war. It seemed like a cruel irony of fate that the very man who had sought so earnestly to establish peace and order should be the means of exciting strife; but one course by which the danger might be averted remained, and this Giano decided to take. With

his wife and family he made a hurried retreat from his beloved Florence, and sought refuge in France, where he had some business connections, hoping that when the storm had subsided he would be recalled. That recall never came. Instead a sentence of banishment was pronounced against him, his house was demolished, his goods seized, and the patriot died far away from the country he had tried so faithfully to serve.

Giano's high qualities were not only recognised, however, by posterity, as is sometimes the case with great men, for the two historians who were his contemporaries in Florence show their warm appreciation of his worth.

Villani speaks of him as "the most loyal and upright citizen, and lover of the common good, of any man in Florence"; while to this high testimony Dino Compagni adds the following pleasing description:—"A forcible and very spirited man, so daring that he defended matters forsaken, said things others left unspoken, and did his utmost to bring justice on the guilty."

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CHAPTER XXIV

A BLUNDER AND ITS RESULTS

AND now in the year 1300 Florence, through a foolishly mistaken action of her own, became the stage for a fresh drama of intrigue and party warfare, which originally started outside her own domain.

In the neighbouring town of Pistoia there was a very powerful family named Cancellieri, which was divided into two branches—the Bianchi (Whites) and the Neri (Blacks). The former were so called after Bianca, the first wife of a common ancestor; while the Blacks, who were descended from a second wife, took their name simply in contra-distinction to the other.

Between these two branches of the family envy and strife grew up, caused, so says Villani, "both by their exceeding fatness [or prosperity] and by suggestion of the devil." Whatever the cause, a quarrel ensued, in which one of the Blacks named Dore,

was injured by a White named Carlino. In revenge he waylaid Carlino's brother, gashed him in the face, and nearly cut off one of his hands. The affair was up to now unpleasant, but of no great importance, but in the end it had most wide-reaching results.

Dore's father, anxious to make the peace, thought the readiest form of apology would be to send Dore himself to Gualfredo, the father of Carlino, to be punished, and Gualfredo took advantage of the opportunity to an extent little expected. He led the young man into the stables, and there coolly chopped off his hand on a horse manger ; he then proceeded to gash his face, and, having thus revenged his son's injuries by inflicting similar ones, sent the maimed and disfigured Dore back to his father.

The Black faction was furious at this abuse of an apology, and the feud between Blacks and Whites became so fierce that in 1300 the Florentine government interposed, took over the lordship of the city, and, by a most unwise step, invited the leaders of both parties into their midst, where

they already had many connections, several of the Cancellieri having married into Florentine families.

The result, as might easily have been foreseen, instead of being peace for Pistoia was strife for Florence, and soon the whole city was divided into parties of Blacks and Whites.

Two of the most prominent Florentines at this time were Corso Donati and Vieri Cerchi. We first met with them at the Battle of Campaldino, fighting side by side in a common cause, and each distinguishing himself by his bravery. These two men had since then been at enmity, and they now became the leaders of the two antagonistic parties of Blacks and Whites. In almost every point they were the opposite of each other. Corso, the head of the Blacks, belonged to a family of nobles, and was of a proud, arrogant nature, which earned for him the nickname of " the Baron," and caused the derisive cry of " Hurrah for the Baron ! " to echo after him as he rode through the streets. He was handsome, courtly, with the easy manners of a gentleman born, and a good speaker, but cruel,

domineering, and self-willed. His harsh, headstrong character is exemplified by his conduct to his gentle sister Piccarda, whose story is related by her kinsman Dante.[1]

Vieri Cerchi, the leader of the Whites, was, as has been said, the direct opposite to Corso. While the latter, with all his faults, was essentially a gentleman, Vieri came from the bourgeois class, and was what we should call now a "self-made man," and he had the deficient education and the awkward manners to be expected. He was a merchant by calling, and had amassed a great deal of wealth, so that he and his family were able to live in great style, and vaunt their magnificence in the face of the neighbouring Donati, who, although noble, were very poor. Vieri was heavy and somewhat indolent, prudent and unambitious, but he was liberal and open-hearted, and gained popularity not only with the populace, but also with the older nobility. As a public speaker he was a failure, and Corso Donati used to retort on the nickname bestowed on himself of Malefame

[1] Dante, Paradiso III.

(ill fame) by calling the rich but dull merchant "the donkey of the ward," and would ask in supercilious tones if "the donkey had brayed that day?" when Vieri had made a speech at the council meeting. This feeling of envy and dislike was not likely to stop at witticisms between people of such fiery blood as the Florentines, and as usual, when matters were approaching a crisis, a trifle precipitated them.

On May Day of this year 1300 the usual festivities described in an earlier chapter were being held in Florence, and on the Piazza of Santa Trinità that night a crowd of knights and citizens were gathered, while in their midst a party of women and girls, clad in the loose, flowing robes of the day, were dancing. It was a picturesque scene of happy gaiety, which was soon to give place to one very different.

Among the crowd were a number of the Cerchi family on horseback, watching the dance with the others present, when up rode a little band of the Donati, passing that way from a supper party,

who now began to press forward to see the fun. In doing so they pushed against the horses of the Cerchi, who instead of making way for them began purposely to hustle and push them in return. This led to a scuffle, and the scuffle very soon to a hand-to-hand fight, which changed the scene of that May Day festival into one of bloodshed. The frightened ladies, thus rudely interrupted in their dance, fled in every direction, and the piazza from a ballroom became a battlefield.

Many were wounded on both sides, and one of the Cerchi had his nose cut off, a disfigurement which served as a constant future reminder of revenge to his party, and thus kept the feeling of enmity awake in a manner which even his death might not have done.

During the uncomfortable and disturbed condition which followed, some of the Florentines appealed secretly to the Pope, Boniface VIII., to interfere, and the Pope in consequence sent for Vieri Cerchi to try and persuade him to make peace with his enemies. The uncouth old merchant, however, did not improve matters, and seriously

offended the Pope by his blunt reply, that "he wished for no enemies, and had, therefore, no need of reconciliation."

Finding that his interview with Vieri advanced matters so little, the Pope then thought he would try the step of sending a peace-maker of his own, and in June the Cardinal Acquasparta arrived in Florence. He did not remain there long. A few days after his arrival the Florentines were keeping their national festival of S. John's day with the usual honours and festivity. Part of the programme was that a large procession should pass up the principal streets and attend service at the cathedral. It consisted of the members of the city guilds, each with its banner, and of the clergy and choir, bearing huge wax candles, much as may be seen in foreign towns at the present day. A great crowd had gathered to watch the procession pass, and on this occasion the ceremony had a most unexpected and undignified ending. In a moment the whole character of the scene was changed, and some of the nobles of the Black party burst upon the procession, beating city

dignitaries, upsetting banners, and putting everything to confusion.

"We are the men who conquered at Campaldino, and are such as you to take from us the honours and dignities of the city?" they cried in explanation of this unjustifiable proceeding.

Suspicion now fell on the Pope's ambassador, who, not without cause, was accused of being involved in a plot with the Blacks, and the ill feeling which this excited against him, found expression one day in an arrow which landed through a window of his apartment. At this the Cardinal, although quite unhurt, was seized with panic, declared that he was in danger of his life, and hurriedly left for Rome, leaving Florence under an interdict.

Meanwhile the Priors of the city, among whom at this time was Dante, had decided that some decided measure must be taken to stop this disturbed state of things, so they banished some of the leaders of both parties, including Dante's greatest friend, the philosopher and poet Guido

Cavalcante, as well as his turbulent enemy Corso Donati.

Even this did not, however, restore peace, and the next step of the Priors to try and secure it was to send ambassadors of their own to ask the Pope's aid.

Three men were chosen as the most suitable for this mission, of whom one was destined never to return to his native city.[1] That one was Dante. We can imagine with what burning words, with what eloquent zeal he would plead for his country's welfare, but all that is recorded of the embassy is an admonition from the Pope to the Ambassadors not to be obstinate and to humble themselves to him. It was really too late, and the cause so dear to the poet's soul was already lost. Unknown to the Whites, to which faction Dante belonged, Boniface had entered into a secret plot with Corso,

[1] Dante's part in the mission to Rome has been much disputed by the more sceptical school of modern Dante critics (see Scartazzini). His choice as one of the ambassadors is however referred to by Boccaccio, and that he went on the embassy is stated as a fact by Dino Compagni, who as a contemporary and as taking an active part himself in the political life of Florence would seem unlikely to be misinformed on a matter of this kind.

the Black Leader, to invite Charles of Valois, a brother of the French King Philip the Handsome, to enter Florence, and in the autumn of the same year Charles with an armed force arrived at the city gates.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRAITOR ENTERS

BEFORE actually approaching Florence Charles halted for a time at the Castle of Staggia, which crowned a wooded height near Siena, and he sent ambassadors to ascertain in what spirit the Florentines were prepared to receive him. These ambassadors were charged with many assurances that Charles was coming solely in a friendly way, and with their good for his only object. They asked permission of the government to address the people themselves, and with a great deal of claptrap about "the Blood Royal of France, which never deceived friend or foe," they persuaded them that Charles's promises of friendship were genuine. When after this address it was put to the vote whether Charles should be admitted or not, the town guilds were all in favour of doing so, with the exception of one, the Bakers, who not only refused their vote, but declared that Charles

would ruin the town, and that by them he should not even be treated with respect. One unfavourable voice was, of course, not heeded among so many others; and on November 1st Charles entered Florence, and was lodged in the Palace of the Frescobaldi, on the south side of the Arno, a position purposely chosen by the Blacks in the town, who were in the plot between him and Corso.

Charles arrived with a large retinue all unarmed, and the unsuspicious Florentines received him with every sign of honour and rejoicing, and sent a procession to meet him of jousters bearing banners, and of knights on horses draped with coloured silks. Thus of their own free will did the foolish citizens admit their enemy into their midst, and prepare ruin and misfortune for their city. All went well for a few days. The false-hearted Charles kept up the appearance of peace, and his Black confederates watched the course of events in silent hopefulness.

On November 5th the traitor, with an escort of his own retainers and of the Florentine citizens, rode through streets, decked in gala fashion to do

him honour, to the church of Santa Maria Novella. Here in the presence of the Podestà, the Priors, the Bishop, and other notable persons, he swore on his honour as a King's son that, if authority over the city were granted him, he would preserve peace and freedom there.

No sooner was this done than the French Prince threw off his disguise. The honourable son of French kings showed himself as a man whose sacred promise was only made to be broken, the lover of peace appeared as the instigator of a revolution. Even on his return journey from the scene of his solemn oath the dismayed Florentines saw him joined by fully armed retainers, while a yet worse sign was the sudden appearance in the streets of strange faces, and with them many of those who were under sentence of banishment. The alarmed citizens began now to realise the true state of affairs, and, hurrying to their homes, prepared as best they could to defend them.

Meanwhile the Priors, taken unawares, and overwhelmed by the serious aspect of affairs, were at a loss how to act, and the whole of that day was

wasted in unprofitable discussion. No one knew whom to trust, for the fact that treachery was at work was now apparent to all.

People of every description flocked into the council-chamber, each urging some different course of action, and the distracted Priors at last listened to one of the least practical suggestions. It was towards nightfall that a holy man of the city came and begged for a secret interview. He was admitted to the council, which he thus addressed: "Sirs, you are in great tribulation, and so is your city. Send, therefore, to the Bishop, and give him orders to at once have a procession, but let it not pass to the other side of the Arno. Thus will the danger be in great measure averted."

The Priors took this advice, and a religious procession passed through the streets, from which, however, it did not prevent scenes of a very different kind from following soon.

"We were well laughed at," says Dino Campagni, who was one of the Priors at the time, "and many said that we should have been better employed in sharpening our swords."

The next day the government did make an attempt at decided action. They issued strong laws for the punishment of tumults and street broils, and on the great public square appeared a block and axe, as ominous reminders of the fate in store for the disobedient. But all was of no avail, for treachery, like an evil disease, had spread throughout the city, and even the officers attached to the government were false. Throughout the day riots continued, and the outlook became still darker. An appeal from the government for the citizens to come armed at dawn to the palace only revealed the deplorable state of things. The great standard of justice waved from the windows through that autumn day in vain. The city was too entirely demoralised for any corporate action to be possible. But to the disheartened and dismayed Priors even worse tidings were soon brought.

A rich and powerful citizen had been to them with a report that one of the principal gates needed repair, and, acting on this advice, a band of workmen under the government banner had been sent out to do the necessary work. Now tidings were

brought that, instead of this being accomplished, some Florentine Blacks, aided by soldiers, had attacked the workmen, seriously wounding some, and putting the others to flight.

The attacking party was led by some of the Tornaquinci family. Where was the blood of the old Tornaquinci who had plunged into the midst of the enemy to die for his country at Montea-perto ? How bitter would have been his grief if he could have seen Florence thus betrayed by those who bore his name. But news of an even more alarming nature reached the anxious Priors that night. A man, disguised as a pedlar selling drugs, had been the round of all the leading Blacks, bidding them to be prepared for a great blow early the next morning. The man had been arrested; but this was but a poor satisfaction, since before his arrest his work had been accomplished.

The dangerous nature of the blow about to be struck and its full import were soon to be revealed. The next morning saw the banished Corso Donati with an armed force at the gates of Florence. Within all was confusion and indecision ; and even Vieri

Cerchi advised that no opposition should be offered to Corso, trusting that when he had once entered the people would rise with one accord to punish him. While the government was wasting time in considering the best plan to pursue, Corso, helped by friends within, had succeeded in breaking down one of the gates and entering the city, where, instead of the populace rising against him, they flocked to his standard with loud cries of "Long live Messer Corso! Long live the Baron!"

Followed by the shouting multitude, and drawn sword in hand, the Black leader made his way unopposed and triumphant through the city to the prisons, where he released the inmates; he then proceeded to the Public Palace, where the Priors were assembled, and told them to lay down the government, and return to their homes—an order which the poor, perplexed Priors, now in terror of their lives, seem to have been very ready to obey. The whole town then fell into the hands of the revolutionists, and a terrible state of anarchy prevailed. In the streets murder and every outrage were openly committed, shops and warehouses

were plundered, and houses and property destroyed by fire.

Through all this Charles, the professed preserver of peace, remained passive and inactive in the security of his residence on the other side of the Arno. He even professed ignorance of the events occurring under his very eyes. When a horrified citizen ventured, as a last hope, to penetrate into the royal presence and entreat him to save the noble city from total destruction, Charles blandly replied that he knew nothing about it ; and when the flames from burning palaces lit up the darkness of night, and it was impossible to feign ignorance, he contented himself with coolly asking : " What great light is that ? " to be quite satisfied when those about him replied : " That, your Royal Highness, is only some poor, thatched cottage on fire."

When at last the excitement of the people had spent itself, and the burning and slaying had ceased, Charles bestirred himself to reconstruct the government, which he placed unreservedly in the hands of the Blacks. He further revealed the

baseness and treachery of his nature by inviting the members of the late government to dine with him, and then detaining them as prisoners, for whom he demanded a heavy ransom.

Soon after this the Pope again sent Cardinal Acquasparta to try and restore peace to the still troubled city; but his efforts were not much more successful than before, so he had recourse to his usual plan when in a difficulty, and placed Florence under an interdict. Apparently the Florentines took this extreme expression of ecclesiastical displeasure less seriously than was usual in those days, and it never seems to have much affected their municipal life.

Before long a plot of the Whites against Charles was discovered, and in consequence a sentence of banishment was pronounced against the principal members of that party, whose goods were confiscated and their houses destroyed. Among those thus condemned was Dante. His wife and children remained in Florence, where their relationship to Corso Donati would protect them, but for Dante himself now began the life

of wandering and exile which only ended with his death.

In the same month Charles of Valois left the town, which he had entered under the false guise of a peacemaker, and to which he had brought so much evil.

CHAPTER XXVI

MISFORTUNES FOR FLORENCE

THE Black party thus restored to Florence the government was practically in the hands of Corso; but his triumph was damped soon after this by a tragedy which struck him very near home.

On Christmas Eve his son Simone was on the piazza in Florence listening to a sermon, when he saw Niccola Cerchi go riding by on his way to a villa a few miles outside Florence. At the sight of this enemy of his family the evil idea occurred to Simone to follow him then and there and murder him, although Niccola was his own uncle, the two rival families of Cerchi and Donati having intermarried. Accompanied by a few followers Simone left the Christmas sermon, with its message of peace and good will, and hastened after Niccola, whom he overtook and assailed at a bridge not far away. In the skirmish that ensued Niccola was unhorsed, and slain; but Simone himself did not escape un-

punished, for before he died Niccola had inflicted a wound in his side which proved fatal the same night. This death of his son was a bitter blow to Corso; for, according to Villani, Simone was one of the most accomplished and promising young men in Florence, and the only hope of his father, whose future downfall and misfortunes he dates from this day.

For some years strife and disorder formed the history of Florence. The spirit of discord was too thoroughly aroused to be easily laid; and now that most of the Whites had been banished the Blacks themselves split into rival factions, and the state of things was no better than before. Plots and counterplots were frequent, and under the harsh rule of a Podestà appointed by the Blacks many innocent persons were tortured and executed. The following anecdote gives an idea of the cruelty practised:—

The distracted mother of two young men, who had been unjustly accused, waylaid their judge in the street, and, kneeling before him on the ground, besought him, with many tears, to spare her sons.

"I am on my way to the palace for that very purpose," was the judge's reply; and, having thus raised the poor woman's hopes, he left her for the Court, where he immediately condemned the two youths to death.

Internal strife was not the only misfortune that befell Florence during those years. In two terrible mishaps that occurred during 1304 the pious chronicler saw an evidence of God's wrath against the wickedness of his countrymen.

On the May Day of that year the Florentines made some attempt at celebrating the festive season, a custom which had fallen into disuse since the day when the Donati and Cerchi had turned a dance into a battle. Now, "just as in the good old times," so Villani says, the citizens gathered together in companies, and vied with each other in celebrating the occasion. The old light-hearted gaiety which had distinguished other May Days seems, however, to have been absent. The memory of burning houses, the mourning for husbands and sons, were too recent for that, and the attempt at gaiety reads as a little forced.

In those days one favourite form of popular amusement was the performance in the open air of miracle plays, representing scenes from sacred history. A certain quarter of the town now hoped to surpass all other entertainments by one of these performances, and the announcement that the subject would be "The World beyond the Grave," and that everyone who desired news of it should be present, served as so strong an attraction that an unusually large crowd gathered to see it. An impromptu theatre was erected on boats in the Arno, and the spectators assembled not only on the banks of the river, but upon the wooden bridge called the Carraia, which spanned it. The scene prepared appealed to the sensational love of horrors, which then as now was common; the pains of hell were displayed in realistic fashion with fire and torment, while men, dressed as demons in every grotesque style, rushed hither and thither, seizing the souls, which, with shrieks and cries, endeavoured to escape.

All at once these mock cries of terror were drowned by real ones, and the performance started

for amusement had a most tragic ending. The Bridge of Carraia, densely packed with its human load, began to give way, and with a sudden collapse fell into the river. Many were drowned, and others crushed to death by falling timber, and others again, who escaped with their lives, were seriously maimed and wounded.

"And," says Villani, "the pastime from sport became earnest, and many went by death to hear the news of the other world." And this he takes as a sign of future ill which, through the wickedness of the people, was to fall on Florence.

The other catastrophe which befell the unfortunate city at about this time was not purely accidental. A priest of bad character, animated by the feelings of hatred and strife so prevalent in its midst, set fire, out of pure wickedness, to a house inhabited by some of his own kinsmen. A stray wind, blowing at the time, fanned the flames with fatal rapidity; house after house was caught in the conflagration, and soon the best and most wealthy part of Florence was engulfed in a sheet of flame which swept on almost to the Arno.

Ruin and disaster followed in its train, for not only were many of the most prosperous families in Florence deprived of their homes, but in the general confusion robbers overran the town, and such treasures as escaped the fire fell into their hands.

No less than seventeen hundred houses are said to have been destroyed. "In truth, all the marrow and yolk and most precious places of the city," declares Villani, in words which still seem to ring with his distress.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DEATH OF A LEADER

DURING all those years of sorrow and misfortune to Florence Corso's arrogance and overbearing conduct had made him many enemies. Never really popular with the Florentines, his ostentatious manner of living, his lordly airs, and the mixed company to whom he allowed the run of his house, brought him still more into disfavour; and this was further increased by his marriage, for the third time, with a daughter of Uguccione della Faggiuola, the head of the exiled Whites, which was the last alliance a loyal Florentine ought to have chosen at this time.

Rumours of worse things began now to spread, and on every side suspicion was growing that Corso aimed at usurping the sovereignty of the city, and converting the commonwealth into an autocracy. This being so, it was not difficult to bring about his downfall. An accusation of

treachery was lodged against him, and within an hour he was condemned to death.

But the Black leader was not to be caught without a struggle. When summoned to receive his sentence he did not appear, and the officials who proceeded to his house in order to arrest him found him prepared for them with stout barricades, behind which his friends and kinsmen, armed with arrows and crossbows, were ready to give them a warm reception.

A battle ensued in which many were killed; but towards evening Corso's adherents began to slacken off. Some had been half-hearted from the beginning, while others grew tired of fighting, and retired to the shelter of their homes. An easy entrance was thus allowed to the attacking party, who broke down the wall of a neighbouring orchard, and thus reached the other side of the barricade. Corso then, seeing that his cause was lost, resolved to make one last dash for freedom. Turning suddenly on the enemy, and followed by a few faithful friends, he succeeded in cutting a

way through to one of the city gates, and made for the open country.

Mounted troops were immediately sent in pursuit, and at an early stage all those who had followed Corso were captured, and he continued his flight alone. Never in all his eventful career had he spurred on horse so desperately as now, for not only death, but shame and dishonour to the name he had borne so proudly lay behind him.

Panting, stumbling, bathed with foam, the animal pressed on; the town with its shouts and noise of battle was left behind; the sound of the struggle between his followers and their captors died away in the distance. Now all was still as the solitary horseman pursued his way into the night—but not for long. A sound soon broke the stillness; the echo of other hoofs on the road behind grew nearer and more fatally distinct, and as he reached the villa of Rovezzano, about three miles from the gates, Corso found himself overtaken and surrounded.

The game was lost now; no further chance of

escape was possible; but one last hope remained to his despairing soul—that he might be saved from the agony of entering as a captive the city over which he had lorded it so proudly. To affect this was, however, a matter of much difficulty, for his captors had orders to bring him alive to Florence, and his threats and bribes were powerless to alter their purposes. Added to the watchfulness of the soldiers he had to contend with physical disability, for he had become suddenly crippled both in feet and hands by an attack of gout, a complaint to which he was much subject. The only movement of which he was capable was that of rolling off his horse, but this he accomplished, and thus achieved his object. The soldiers pressed round him as he fell, fearing it was an attempt to escape, and one, in over-zeal, gave him a blow with his javelin which proved fatal. The spot where this occurred was just outside the Monastery of San Salvi, and when the soldiers had gone leaving Corso for dead on the ground, the monks found him there, and bore him inside; but whether he was actually dead then, or whether he died that

night soothed by their cares, is not certain. He was buried in the grounds the next morning very privately and quietly, for fear of a disturbance.[1]

[1] In the above the narratives of Villani and Compagni, who were in Florence at the time, have been followed.

Dante's account of the death of Corso is somewhat different (see Purgatorio XXIV. 85).

CHAPTER XXVIII

NEW HOPES FOR ITALY

AND now a new chapter of Italian history is entered upon, and with the election of Henry of Luxemburg as Emperor in 1308 there dawned once more before men's eyes the ideal of a united Italy.

For sixty years—that is, since the death of Frederick II.—no emperor had crossed the Alps to receive the homage of his subjects there and to be crowned with the imperial crown at Rome. Emperors in name only, they were practically unknown to their Italian subjects, and had little influence in the country over which they were supposed to rule. The greater towns, such as Milan, Florence, Pisa, and others, had in consequence more and more cast off the imperial yoke, and had, in fact, virtually become independent republics.

In 1308 all this was changed. Henry of Luxemburg, who in this year was elected, was a man of remarkable character. The ruler before of a com-

paratively insignificant state, with few followers and small means, his courageous spirit led him to attempt that gigantic task of "healing the wounds of Italy," for the neglect of which Dante severely blames his predecessors.[1]

In person Henry was of middle height and of pleasing appearance, save for the slight disfigurement of a cast in one eye. He excelled in all knightly exercise and in tournaments, and, in an age conspicuous for its chivalry, was one of its most distinguished figures. It was said that there was no knight in Europe who could unhorse Henry of Luxemburg.

To the virtues of courage and daring the new Emperor added the rarer mediæval ones of a love of justice and a strong sense of duty, and, when called upon to fill the most important political post in Europe, he did not hesitate to take the full responsibility so lightly borne by his immediate predecessors, nor shrink from the attempt to reconcile the rival parties which had distracted Italy for so long. Although it was the Ghibellines who,

[1] See Dante, Purgatorio VI.

in accordance with their old tradition, turned to him as their leader and head, he was singularly impartial in his treatment of both Guelphs and Ghibellines, and by recalling exiles and reinstating members of each party in power, he sought to heal the long-standing feud between them.

Perhaps no much higher praise can be found for him than the striking words of Villani, who records that he was a man "never depressed by adversity; never, in prosperity, elated with pride or intoxicated with joy."

Such was the heroic figure who now crossed the Alps to take up the leading part in the drama of Italian history. At first his progress was marked with every sign of success. Turin, Asti, Novara, and other towns of Northern Italy gladly opened their gates to him, and received him with joyful processions. At Milan the iron crown of Lombardy was placed on his brow, while the excited people wept tears of joy at the impressive ceremony, and messengers from all the other cities of Lombardy took an oath of allegiance to him.

"He came down," says Dino Compagni, "from

city to city, receiving their fidelity and bringing peace to each, as if he were an angel of God."

But in Florence what preparations were made to receive him? There the old Guelph spirit was too deeply rooted for an Emperor to be welcomed, and while the other towns were rejoicing and sending messages of good-will the Florentines, in grim silence, occupied themselves with the ominous task of rebuilding their walls and widening their moats.

They had, however, no opportunity of closing their gates in the Emperor's face at present. The first warmth of Henry's reception in Northern Italy was soon followed by a different attitude. In Milan his joyful acclamation was succeeded by a plot against him which spread rapidly to other Lombard towns, and Henry's time was too much occupied in subduing these rebellious cities and in restoring something like order for him to pursue his way through the hostile country farther south. Tuscany was not, however, ignored by the Emperor, and since he could not at present enter there himself he sent as his ambassadors of peace

two priests, one Pandolfo Savelli, a Roman noble, and the other Niccola, Bishop of Butronte. Many strange adventures befell these two men in performance of their errand, and the Bishop has left a written account which gives full particulars.

They first came to Bologna, where they sent a messenger into the city to ask permission to pass through. By way of answer the Bolognese clapped him in prison ; but he managed to escape and to join the ambassadors, who were awaiting his return only three miles away.

Warned by their danger they changed their route, and, instead of passing through Bologna, took their way by the passes of the Apennines, where they had only escaped one peril to encounter another, for these passes were swarming with Florentine troops. They succeeded, however, in evading them, and at last, after a difficult and dangerous journey of two days, they arrived at a village called Lastra on the outskirts of Florence.

The next morning the same messenger who had escaped so cleverly at Bologna was sent into the town with a message of peace and friendly letters

from the Pope and the Emperor to the government. On his arrival a council was hastily summoned; but the day wore on without any decision being made, and at last the weary messenger, to whom no offer seems to have been made of accommodation or hospitality, retired to his lodging outside the town, leaving word where he could be found if wanted. No sooner had he gone than an answer was given, but such an answer as they might well have waited for his absence to announce. In every place, where it was usual to issue them, proclamations were made that the two priests had arrived, that they were ambassadors of the tyrant who was doing his best to destroy the Guelph party, and was now on his way to give Florence over to the enemy; and further, it declared that the ambassadors were sent by Henry for the express purpose of sowing dissension and of creating strife.

"We, who were priests!" exclaims Bishop Niccola, in holy and innocent indignation, when giving his account of the hard things said of him and his companion. The proclamation ended with

a quite inexcusable clause allowing any outrage to be committed on the persons and properties of the ambassadors, who, as a final insult, were accused of carrying large sums of money, with which to bribe the Tuscans.

News of this proclamation, so dangerous to them, reached the two persons principally concerned through an uncle of Pandolfo's, who was in Florence at the time, and immediately wrote to warn them of what had taken place.

The remainder of the story is perhaps best told in the graphic words of Bishop Niccola himself.

"We had," he says, "already gone to bed, and were asleep, when the letter reached us at Lastra, and at once we rose in ignorance of what we ought to do. To return to Bologna or its district was for us the most dangerous course of all, as we had already proved; we knew no other road, and the lateness of the hour added to our peril. We wrote to the Podestà and to the Captain of Florence, who were both born in Papal territory, asking them what we ought to do.

"In the morning we made ready our horses, loaded the packages, and as we were at table, still awaiting the reply of the Podestà, we heard the Toscin sound. Immediately we saw the road filled with armed men, both on foot and on horseback, who surrounded our house, and a fine fellow of the Magalotti family, a plebeian, tried to mount the stairs, crying "To death, to death!" But our host stood, sword in hand, and would allow no one to pass.

"During the tumult our beasts of burden and nearly all our horses were carried off by the soldiers, who finally forced a way to the staircase, and entered our room with drawn knives. At this some of our servants fled, throwing themselves from the window into the garden; others hid under the beds in fear of their lives, so there were very few left around us. But God, who delivered us from their hands, comforted our hearts so well that, on my conscience, I feared nothing for myself, although I was more exposed than anyone. While this was happening there was a disturbance in Florence, for several said that it was ill done to

banish us thus, above all to banish the Lord Pandolfo, who was one of the first nobles in Rome. For this cause the Podestà sent us one of his knights, and the Captain of the People, a citizen. On the way they found a portion of our horses and beasts of burden, which were being led to the town; them they took from the soldiers, and gave back to us, telling us at the same time that if we valued our lives we had better retrace our steps as quickly as possible. We sought to reveal to them our embassy, they refused to hear it; we sought to show them our letters, they refused to see them. We asked them to allow us to pass through Florence by night, and guarded in such a manner that we could hold speech with no one; this they refused, saying that their orders were to make us return the way we came. After much discussion between themselves they at last set us on a road which led through the territory of Count Guido. They could only restore to us eleven horses and three beasts of burden. The Lord Pandolfo lost more than I, because he had more to lose. As for me, I lost my rosary and all that I

had in the world of gold and silver, except a gold pencil to my tablets and a ring on my finger." [1]

The course taken by the Florentines, nevertheless, benefited the imperial cause in the end, for on reaching the territory of the Guidi both branches of that family, although long since split into Guelph and Ghibelline, received the priests in a friendly spirit. They were given money and horses, and succeeded in gaining the allegiance of some of the smaller towns, so that, when Henry soon after reached Pisa on his way to Rome, they were able to join him with a fairly large body of armed men.

The Emperor then marched to Rome, where, after considerable opposition, he received the imperial crown; and it was not until the following year, 1313, that he prepared to punish the rebellious city of Florence. The poet Dante, who watched his progress with burning and impatient soul, had addressed fiery words of invective and entreaty to him from his place of exile the year before.[2] To

[1] Translated from Sismondi's French version. See also Gino Capponi II. 7.

[2] See Dante, Epis. III.

his idealistic vision Henry was the great saviour of his country, and in imagination he already saw Florence purged by him from all her faults and sins, and under his rule rising to a nobler eminence than any she had yet attained. But the poet's dream was a dream only, and never destined to be fulfilled.

Henry never entered Florence.

For some weeks he waited outside, devastating the fertile country, but carrying on the siege in so desultory a manner that provisions for the Florentines passed freely within the gates, and much of the usual commerce was continued.

Finally, he withdrew to the friendly town of Pisa, and from there led a large army the next year against the Sienese. But before a battle could take place an unforeseen event destroyed for ever the hopes of the Ghibellines. Henry, whose health had been failing for some time, was seized by severe illness, and at the Monastery of Buonconvente, twelve miles south of Siena, on August 24th, 1313, he died.

The independence of Florence was probably

saved by this event, and as the declared head of the Guelph party in Northern Italy she attained for a time a greater apparent importance than ever before.

But, nevertheless, the best days of her glory had departed, and the strife and greed and corruption, which her greatest son deplored in words wrung from his inmost soul, as in his exile he watched her decay, wrought her own ruin in time. Her punishment lay before her when the freedom on which she had prided herself so long was trampled in the dust, and the age of the despots succeeded to that of the commonwealth.

But before closing these pages one other aspect of the days of struggling corporate life must be mentioned. In the years which witnessed so much warfare and strife time was also found for the gentler arts of peace, and it was during the period between the Battle of Monteaperto and the death of Henry VII. that there flourished in Florence some of those great painters, architects, and writers who have given her such a wide fame in the history of modern culture.

It was then that the whole city turned out with joyous acclaim as Cimabue's masterpiece[1] was carried to its resting-place in the church of Santa Maria Novella; that Giotto, painter, sculptor, and architect, rose into world-wide eminence, and adorned his adopted city with his works; that Arnolfo conceived the design for the cathedral whose noble proportions are still a delight to all. It was then too that, like a fair flower growing on the edge of a volcano, the lyrics and songs of early Tuscan poetry were written and sung; that Dante gave utterance to the most delicate and beautiful of love stories, and dreamed the vision which was later to take shape in the Divine Comedy.

And it was then that Italian prose sprang into existence as a literary medium, and that good old Villani wrote his chronicle in the simple and graphic language which has given it a place of lasting fame among literary masterpieces.

[1] Attributed by some of the most recent critics to Duccio di Buoninsegna. See Prof. Langton Douglas, "History of Siena."

THE END

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